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A HISTORY

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OXFORD PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTS

Edited by **KAROLINA HÜBNER**

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OXFORD PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTS

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In memory of Charles Mills

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Series Editor's Foreword

Oxford Philosophical Concepts (OPC) offers an innovative approach to philosophy's past and its relation to other disciplines. As a series, it is unique in exploring the transformations of central philosophical concepts from their ancient sources to their modern use.

OPC has several goals: to make it easier for historians to contextualize key concepts in the history of philosophy, to render that history accessible to a wide audience, and to enliven contemporary discussions by displaying the rich and varied sources of philosophical concepts still in use today. The means to these goals are simple enough: eminent scholars come together to rethink a central concept in philosophy's past. The point of this rethinking is not to offer a broad overview, but to identify problems the concept was originally supposed to solve and investigate how approaches to them shifted over time, sometimes radically. Recent scholarship has made evident the benefits of reexamining the standard narratives about western philosophy. OPC's editors look beyond the canon and explore their concepts over a wide philosophical landscape. Each volume traces a notion from its inception as a solution to specific problems through its historical transformations to its modern use, all the while acknowledging its historical context. Each OPC volume is a history of its concept in that it tells a story about changing solutions to its well defined problem. Many editors have found it appropriate to include long-ignored writings drawn from the

Islamic and Jewish traditions and the philosophical contributions of women. Volumes also explore ideas drawn from Buddhist, Chinese, Indian, and other philosophical cultures when doing so adds an especially helpful new perspective. By combining scholarly innovation with focused and astute analysis, OPC encourages a deeper understanding of our philosophical past and present.

One of the most innovative features of OPC is its recognition that philosophy bears a rich relation to art, music, literature, religion, science, and other cultural practices. The series speaks to the need for informed interdisciplinary exchanges. Its editors assume that the most difficult and profound philosophical ideas can be made comprehensible to a large audience and that materials not strictly philosophical often bear a significant relevance to philosophy. To this end, each OPC volume includes Reflections. These are short stand-alone essays written by specialists in art, music, literature, theology, science, or cultural studies that *reflect on* the concept from their own disciplinary perspectives. The goal of these essays is to enliven, enrich, and exemplify the volume's concept and reconsider the boundary between philosophical and extraphilosophical materials. OPC's Reflections display the benefits of using philosophical concepts and distinctions in areas that are not strictly philosophical, and encourage philosophers to move beyond the borders of their discipline as presently conceived.

The volumes of OPC arrive at an auspicious moment. Many philosophers are keen to invigorate the discipline. OPC aims to provoke philosophical imaginations by uncovering the brilliant twists and unforeseen turns of philosophy's past.

Christia Mercer

Gustave M. Berne Professor of Philosophy
Columbia University in the City of New York

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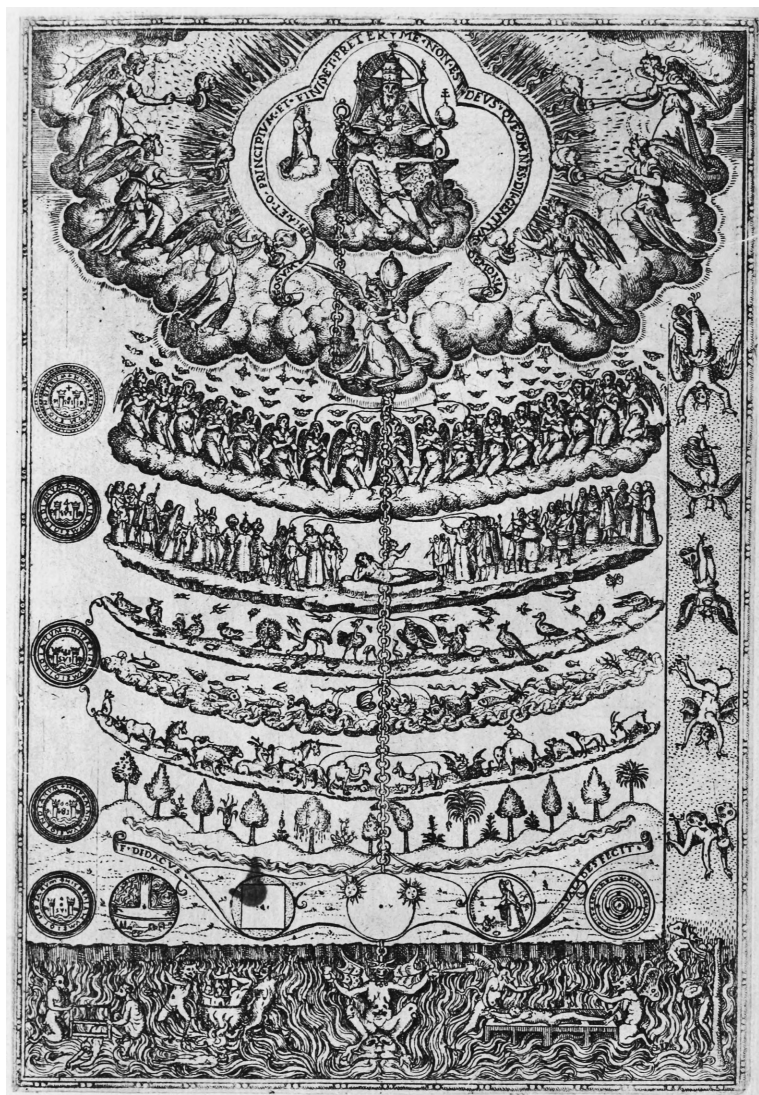


FIGURE 1 Diego Valadés, *Rhetorica christiana* (1579)

Introduction

THE STAKES OF BEING HUMAN

Karolina Hübner

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they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them
—FRANTZ FANON, *The Wretched of the Earth*

What does it mean to be *human*? Is there something that unites all of us and makes us distinct from computers, other great apes, Martians, gods? And what are the ethical and political consequences of how we answer such questions?

The aim of this book is to trace the history of the concept “human,” by examining the history of *metaphysical* accounts of human nature and human species—the history of proposals for distinctively human properties and capacities—and the *ethical and political* repercussions of such accounts. There is, arguably, historical and philosophical value in illuminating how our self-understanding as “human” has evolved across time and place. But there is also a more basic question that this book can help us answer: namely, whether there is philosophical,

ethical, or political value in continuing to think in terms of something like a common “human nature”. Does positing a shared “humanity” allow us to understand something that thinking (say) in terms of individuals or social relations alone cannot? Is there philosophical value to reflecting on the world through the lens of this concept, or from some allegedly specifically *human* standpoint? Hasn’t the rather old-fashioned philosophical question *What is human nature?* been superseded by the scientific problems of the trajectory and mechanisms of hominid evolution? Should we then let this concept go the way of discredited concepts like phlogiston and ether?

These kinds of worries about the potential theoretical value of the concept of “human nature” are only part of the dilemma; worries about its ethical and political value are another part. For it is arguably a paradox of this concept that it holds both a promise of universal equality and at the same time has all too often been used to rationalize exploitation, oppression, and even violence.¹ For example, appeals to a universal human nature offer a way to ground the notion of human rights, which in turn can be a powerful tool against injustice. Likewise, it might be true that, as some philosophers have claimed, we have to first understand human nature in order to understand either what a *good* human life might look like, or how social inequities come about. All these uses of the concept of human nature seem well worth preserving.

Less happily, insistence on the existence of a universal human nature might easily lead us to neglect actual human *diversity*. Likewise, as many feminist thinkers have pointed out, despite the pretense to universality, historically most philosophical accounts of human nature

1 Cf. Louise Antony, “‘Human Nature’ and Its Role in Feminist Theory,” in *Philosophy in a Feminist Voice: Critiques and Reconstructions*, ed. Janet Kourany (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 63–91, 65.

The epigraph to this essay is from Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2005 [1963]).

have taken this nature to be fully exemplified only by men. (As Louise Antony put it, for such canonical figures as Aristotle, Rousseau, and Kant, women are “at best *defective* tokens of the human type.”)² Most appallingly perhaps, the idea of a human nature has historically been misused to deny full-blown humanity to certain individuals: differences in skin color or other physiological traits have been viewed as signs of a “lesser” humanity, or of outright inhumanity, and used to justify great harms. (Think of the Nazis’ subhuman Jewish *Untermenschen*, or of the Hutus’ Tutsi “cockroaches.”)³

The list of the ill-uses of the concept of human nature doesn’t end here. The belief in a *distinctive* human nature—in traits that all and only human beings, but no other kind of thing, would have—was historically often expressed as the claim of a *superiority* of human nature in comparison to all other species. Indeed, one of the most enduring ontological models in the history of philosophy is that of the Great Chain of Being, on which all species (and occasionally races) “naturally” form a hierarchy.⁴ On this model, human beings are assigned a place second only to angels and God himself. With the hierarchy comes a natural right to domination. That other creatures are there for humans’ benefit is a view shared by the ancient Stoics (for example Chrisyppus), and medieval Christian philosophers (for example

2 Antony, “Human Nature,” 64. See Charlotte Witt, “Feminist Metaphysics,” in *Mind of One’s Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity*, ed. Louise M. Antony and Charlotte E. Witt (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), 302–18; Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: “Male” and “Female” in Western Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

3 On the history of dehumanization in the context of slavery and genocide see e.g. Fanon, *Wretched*; David Livingstone Smith, *Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2011). On the rise of the concept of race in the early modern period, see e.g. Justin E. H. Smith, *Nature, Human Nature, and Human Difference: Race in Early Modern Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). See also Mills, Reflection here.

4 For a classic discussion of this model, see Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936). On the role of the idea of a chain of being in misconceptions about evolution, see Stephen J. Gould, *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History* (New York: Norton, 1989); on its relation to race, see Mills, Reflection here.

Thomas Aquinas).⁵ In the words of Genesis, God granted humans “dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (1:28).

As is shown again and again in the essays that follow, for many thinkers, our superiority over mere “beasts” or “brutes” was thought to be due to our *cognitive* capacities in particular. The early Christian theologian Augustine, for example, linked our supremacy to our resemblance to God by virtue of having a “rational soul” (*Christian Doctrine* 1.22).⁶ The eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant concurred that human beings are “altogether different in rank and dignity from things, such as irrational animals, with which one may deal and dispose at one’s discretion” (*Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* [1798]).⁷

Call this view of human nature the *rationalist-exceptionalist* conception of human nature. The view—which not only grants the distinctiveness of human beings, but defines this distinctiveness in terms of specifically cognitive superiority—figures very prominently in the essays that follow. It is traceable at least to Plato’s claim that the reasoning and ruling part of the human soul makes seeking truth part of human nature.⁸ Indeed, historically, it seems that the capacity for something like reasoning or thought, and for what reasoning or thought make possible—whether it be self-consciousness, language, culture, religiosity, ideals, freedom, transcendence of the physical and the natural—is, arguably, the most common candidate for a trait that

5 For discussion, see e.g. Richard Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals: The Origins of the Western Debate* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

6 Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, ed. and tr. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

7 Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. and tr. Robert Louden and Gunter Zoller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 227–429, 239. Kant also held that unjustified killing of an animal is a failure in one’s duties toward “mankind” only, not toward the animal itself (“Moral Philosophy: Collin’s Lecture Notes,” in *Lectures on Ethics*, ed. and trans. P. Heath and J. B. Schneewind [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 37–222, 212). On Kant, see Tolley, chapter 9 here.

8 On Plato, see Kamtekar, chapter 1 here.

allegedly sets us apart from (and elevates us above) the rest of nature. One may object to my lumping all of these claims together under the single rubric of “rationalist exceptionalism.” Surely, one may object, claims about specifically or uniquely human religiosity or freedom are irreducible to a claim about a specifically human capacity for thinking or rationality. That is true; but it also seems worth noting that thinking of human beings as beings who don’t merely exist in the physical here-and-now, but instead strive for something—for an as-yet-undetermined future, or ideals, or religious rewards, or for a transcendence of the animal, the perishable, and the earthly—is a way of being in the world that is, surely, made possible in great part at least by thought. Hence my proposal that, historically, one prominent way of thinking about what it means to be human is not just that to be human is to be a thinking thing, or one endowed with a rational soul, but more broadly that it is to be a thinking or rational thing and so also a thing endowed with all the capacities—for transcendence, freedom, ideals, and so on—that thinking makes possible. Another way to put this is that, arguably, one of the lessons of this book is the *diversity* of ways in which being a thinking thing has been understood to be central to being human. Even Aristotle, whose definition of human beings as beings with *logos* (roughly, reason) is the locus classicus of the rationalist-exceptionalist conception of human beings, took human beings to be engaged in a whole *range* of rational activities: not just in theoretical reflection and practical deliberation but also in the refinement of emotions and appetites.⁹ Moreover, since, for Aristotle, these activities do not assume the same form in all human beings, there are on his view many different ways of being human: as many as there are ways of participating in rationality.

9 On Aristotle, see Deslauriers and Filotas, chapter 2 here.

Another noteworthy finding of this book is the astonishing power and longevity of the influence of Aristotle. It is visible not only, as one may have expected, in the medieval period, the Renaissance, and the seventeenth century, but also in the twentieth century—in Heidegger’s work (see Withy, chapter 10 here) and contemporary philosophy of biology (see Walsh, chapter 11 here).

Accounts of human nature that focus on a capacity for thought or for rationality face several fairly predictable conceptual or theoretical challenges. For example, they have to be able to distinguish human beings from God and other spiritual beings, whose nature presumably is also to think. They also have to explain how *other* human traits, such as embodiment, are to be understood. (For example, is our embodiment something that truly can be transcended?)¹⁰ But rationalist exceptionalism is also trailed by *ethical* worries. For instance, in one of the most notorious episodes in the history of attempts to distinguish human beings from other kinds of things, René Descartes concluded that of all earthly creatures only human beings were sentient; on this view, “lower” animals are nothing but natural machines “consisting only of wheels and springs” (*Discourse on Method*, Part 5). As such animals are not even potential moral *patients* to us, that is, objects of potential moral consideration.¹¹ As the Cartesian Nicholas Malebranche put it, animals so understood “eat without pleasure, cry without pain, grow without knowing it; they desire nothing, fear nothing, know nothing” (*Search after Truth*, VI.2.vii).¹²

The ethical repercussions of adopting a particular metaphysics of human nature could hardly be clearer than they are in this case. Yet, we may want to object, the route from metaphysical claims of distinctiveness or uniqueness of human beings to any *ethical* conclusions we may be entitled to draw on that basis is surely more complicated. Indeed, even if we were to adopt a hierarchical model of species, if our high position on the ladder of beings were to have any moral repercussions, shouldn't it rather impose on us, as the more naturally perfect and

10 See Olson, chapter 12 here, on the contemporary transhumanist movement, which answers this question affirmatively.

11 René Descartes, *Philosophical Writings*, 3 vols., ed. and tr. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), I.142. See *Passions of the Soul*, part I.50 (Descartes, *Philosophical Writings*, I.348).

12 Nicholas Malebranche, *The Search after Truth and Elucidations*, ed. and tr. Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

powerful, a *concern* for the more vulnerable, rather than a title to use them as we please? And, finally, even if we were to grant that rationality in particular separates us from the rest of nature, must we grant that this has *moral* consequences?

This last point was made forcefully by the eighteenth-century utilitarian Jeremy Bentham. Celebrating glimmers of resistance to the enslavement of fellow human beings, he also expressed the hope that, in the future, we could extend our moral regard even beyond our species:

The day may come, when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withholden from them but by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may come one day to be recognized, that the number of the legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the *os sacrum*, are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate. What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or, perhaps, the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month, old. But suppose the case were otherwise, what would it avail? the question is not, Can they *reason*? nor, Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?¹³

The point is not that enslavement of fellow humans is a moral failure equal to the mistreatment of animals. Rather it is that, in delineating the proper scope of moral concern, it is misguided to focus either on skin color or on the capacity for reasoning or language as the

13 Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, ed. J. H. Burns and H. L. A. Hart (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970 [1789]), 282 note 2.

On sentience as grounding natural animal rights and our duties toward them, see also the discussion of Rousseau in Evrigenis, chapter 8 here.

relevant criteria. For Bentham, the morally relevant question is that of a capacity for suffering, common to all sentient beings, human and nonhuman alike.

The historical association between human nature and rationality also raises a worry from a feminist perspective. Historically, it's been suggested, rationality has been associated with masculinity in particular.¹⁴ The generalized form of this worry is that what masquerades as a merely descriptive universal claim (to be human is to be rational) is neither universal (insofar as it favors one gender, or one race, or one class, over another) nor merely descriptive (insofar as it expresses and sustains the privileges that make up sexist, racist, and classist societies).¹⁵

To be clear, historically, the belief in human exceptionalism by virtue of rationality on which I have focused thus far was not endorsed universally. It was rejected forcefully by the Renaissance philosopher Michel Montaigne, who took this conception of human nature to be a symptom of the excessive vanity of a creature that “dares to presume that he knows anything”:

what are the grounds on which [man] has founded and erected all those advantages which he thinks he has over other creatures and who has convinced him that it is for his convenience, his service, that, for so many centuries, there has been established and maintained the awesome motion of the vault of heaven. . . . Is it possible to imagine anything more laughable than that this pitiful, wretched creature—who is not even master of himself, but exposed to shocks on every side—should call himself Master and Emperor of a universe, the smallest particle of which he has no means of knowing, let alone swaying! . . . Man is the most blighted and frail of all creatures and, moreover, the most given to pride. This creature knows

¹⁴ See e.g. Lloyd, *Man of Reason*.

¹⁵ Cf. Antony, “Human Nature.”

and sees that he is lodged down here, among the mire and shit of the world, bound and nailed to the deadest, most stagnant part of the universe, in the lowest storey of the building, the farthest from the vault of heaven. . . [the] lowest category of animate creatures. (*Apology for Raymond Sebond*)¹⁶

Without embracing the radically pessimistic antihumanism entertained here by Montaigne, many of the thinkers discussed in this book nonetheless opposed the exceptionalist accounts of human nature with fully *naturalistic* accounts of it. By “naturalistic” I mean accounts of human nature that eschew not just anthropocentrism and speciesism,¹⁷ but even differences *in kind* among species, and instead endeavor to apply the same methods of explanation to human beings as to other natural things. Whatever differences there may be between being a human and, say, being a horse, they are of a degree, and rooted in the same general features of reality. On such views, to quote the eighteenth-century philosopher David Hume, in nature “[e]verything is conducted by springs and principles, which are not peculiar to man, or any one species of animals” (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, III.xvi).¹⁸

The long-running battle between rationalistic exceptionalism and naturalistic conceptions of human nature is another theme of this book. Sometimes the naturalistic counter-current can be found in the work of one and the same philosopher. Thus for example Aristotle, Mengzi, Zhuangzi, Avicenna, Alfarabi, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Cavendish, all of whom associate human nature with thinking, or with what thinking makes possible, all also insist, to a lesser or greater degree, on genuine *continuities* between us and other parts of nature. Sometimes this

16 Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, tr. M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1993).

17 For a classic discussion of speciesism as an arbitrary prejudice in favor of the interests of members of one's own species, see Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 2nd ed. (New York: New York Review of Books, 1990).

18 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), III.xvi.

takes the form of insisting that we too are animals; or conversely that other kinds of things can think, or feel, or form societies just as we can; and even that their abilities *outstrip* those of human beings. According to the medieval Islamic thinker Alfarabi, for instance, even plants form associations aimed at common goals.¹⁹ The classical Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi and the Dutch early modern Spinoza both rejected the anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism of their predecessors: Zhuangzi regarded human concepts, values, and tastes as *merely* human;²⁰ Spinoza saw the anthropomorphic projection of human intentionality onto the rest of nature as the fundamental “prejudice” distorting all our thinking. Since Darwin’s 1859 publication of *The Origin of Species* in particular, the weight of scientific authority was thrown behind challenges to human exceptionalism, and in defense of a fundamental ontological and explanatory continuity of *Homo sapiens* with other species. In particular, work on animal cognition has again and again demonstrated that cognitive skills and behaviors once thought unique to human beings (whether having to do with language, tool use, possession of a theory of mind, and so on) are at least to some degree possessed also by nonhuman animals with whom we share common evolutionary roots.²¹ But these naturalistic approaches to cognition—the very cluster of properties singled out by the rationalist-exceptionalist accounts of human nature—didn’t have to wait until Darwin. Already Aristotle—who had done so much to associate human nature with *logos*—viewed human rationality as continuous with the cognitive activities of other animals. Medieval Islamic philosophers Alfarabi and Avicenna proposed that nonhuman animals can not only feel emotions but form conceptions, and in some sense have a language, even

19 On medieval Islamic thought, see López-Farjeat, chapter 4 here.

20 On classical Chinese thought and Spinoza see Perkins and Renz, chapters 3 and 7 here, respectively.

21 See Gruen, *Ethics and Animals: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); for a useful introduction to issues in animal cognition see e.g. Kristin Andrews, *The Animal Mind*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2020).

if—as in the case of birds, on Alfarabi’s account—such a language employed letters unknown to human beings. Avicenna went so far as to ascribe a rudimentary form of self-awareness to nonhuman animals. In turn, the Renaissance philosopher Salviati claimed that *every* living being understands and reasons.²² Naturalism about cognition also shaped the vitalist and panpsychist metaphysics of early modern thinkers like Spinoza and Cavendish. For Cavendish, although there is a type of knowledge and perception that is unique to human beings, it is also the case that *all* things have the capacity for both sensation and reason, and even for self-knowledge. There is, as she memorably puts it, a “vegetative” and even “mineral” “sense and knowledge.”²³ Hume echoed the sentiment: “beasts are endowed with thought and reason as well as men” (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, III.xvi).²⁴

Let me return to a question posed earlier: *Where do we go from here?* We are asking here about the direction for future thought: is the notion of a “human being” worth preserving? Is it separable from the use and the racist, sexist, and speciesist abuse that has been made of it? Is it even possible—or desirable—to try to articulate a notion of a “human nature” unaffected by race or gender or class, as if were possible to observe humanity in a pure form—a raceless, genderless, and classless human being simpliciter?²⁵ Can we talk about “human beings” without falling either into a callous anthropocentrism, or a false universalism, or an antihumanist pessimism—that hopeless resignation of seeing ourselves, in Montaigne’s words, as “the deadest, most stagnant part of the universe”?²⁶

22 On Renaissance thinkers, see Edelheit, chapter 5 here.

23 Cavendish, *Observations on Experimental Philosophy* (1668), edited by E. O’Neill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Cited as OEP followed by page number.

24 Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, III.xvi.

25 Cf. Antony, “Human Nature.”

26 For a different diagnosis of the problems associated with the concept and a different direction for the future, see Brassier, Reflection here.

There is nowhere to hide from the fact that many of the so-called “canonical” texts of philosophy are guilty of misusing the concept. For example, Hume’s aforementioned generosity toward animal reason is overshadowed by his insistence on a “constant difference” in cognitive achievements of different human races, a difference understood as an “original distinction between breeds of men.”²⁷ But our past misuses of a concept don’t necessarily fix how we use it in the future: our past mistakes don’t mean we can’t do better from now on.²⁸ And, at the very least, as long as the concept of human nature remains a fixture of *folk* self-understanding, and of folk explanations, we cannot, it seems, simply consign this concept to the dustbin of history, along with ether and phlogiston.

To address more specifically some of the feminist apprehensions about the concept, one of the things this book shows, I think, is that broadening the scope of our inquiries to include not just works by Aristotle, Rousseau, or Kant but also less “canonical” texts by *women* philosophers demonstrates that, as a matter of historical record, it would be a great oversimplification to conclude that rationality was seen exclusively or predominantly as a male trait. As Margaret Atherton had argued, seventeenth-century women philosophers like Mary Astell also took themselves to have a human nature, understood precisely as a capacity for reasoning.²⁹ Furthermore, on the grounds that reason was supposed to be a *universal* human faculty, given equally to both men and women, Astell used the concept of human nature to argue for such social and economic reforms as would lead

27 David Hume, “Of National Characters,” in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed., rev. by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 208n. On this see e.g. Peter Kail, “The Sceptical Beast in the Beastly Sceptic: Human Nature in Hume,” *Royal Institute of Philosophy supplement* 70 (2012): 219–231. See also Mills, Reflection here.

28 Cf. Witt, “Feminist Metaphysics.”

29 Margaret Atherton, “Cartesian Reason and Gendered Reason,” in Antony and Witt, *Mind of One’s Own*, 21–37; Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Parts I and II*, ed. Patricia Springborg (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Literary Texts, 2002). See also Lascano and Schliesser, chapter 6 here.

not just men, but also (at least white) women, to a full flourishing of their human nature.

As Astell's example shows, the concept of human nature, understood as a universally given but not universally actualized power, also has a liberatory potential. The notion of a human nature provides us with a possible standard or norm in relation to which a thinker like Astell can say of her society: *This is wrong, it is dehumanizing*.³⁰ This use of the concept, like its misuses, is also part of its history.

This way of thinking of human nature as something-still-to-be-realized is another lesson of this book. Although the concept of "human nature" might easily lead us to think that we are dealing here with some fixed biological fact, several of the thinkers discussed in the essays here offer their accounts of human nature not as accounts of some such pre-determined fact but of a *project or task* extending into the future.³¹ For them it is a matter not of discovering of what we are—a species fixed in all our properties once and for all—but of *becoming* human. Arguably, this is one way to read Rousseau's account of human beings in the "state of nature": not as a reference to a mythical past but as a description of humanity's potential, all the better to see how far we still have to go.³² Likewise, for Kant, answering the question *What is a human being?* is arguably a task for philosophy. For Heidegger, *becoming* Dasein is an ethical project that we must undertake, with the courage of facing up to the possibility that things might be radically different in the future.

30 Cf. Witt, "Feminist Metaphysics," and Antony, "Human Nature."

31 Indeed, even contemporary philosophy of biology is unlikely to support essentialism about species: Darwinian theory and modern taxonomic practice appear to rule out such essentialism. (There is, for one, too much variability of traits within species.) (See e.g. Samir Okasha, "Darwinian Metaphysics: Species and the Question of Essentialism," *Synthese* 131 [2002]: 191–213.) Many contemporary philosophers of science also understand species to evolve indefinitely, in an open-ended manner, where this principle applies also to our psychology: as environments, social and otherwise, and selection pressures change, human psychology may also continue to evolve (e.g. David J. Buller, *Adapting Minds: Evolutionary Psychology and the Persistent Quest for Human Nature* [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005]).

See Walsh, chapter 11 here, for an argument that evolutionary theory should nonetheless retain the concept of human nature.

32 See Evrigenis, chapter 8 here.

Perhaps then we should understand the guiding question of the book—*What is human nature?*—as a pragmatic, social, and political question: *What should we become?* Such a project arguably calls also for theoretical reflection: What concept (or concepts) of a “human being” should we promote, given the goals we may have (for example, of greater equality or humaneness)?³³ Can (for example) Aristotle’s claim that even if reasoning is what makes us human, there are also many different ways to reason, help us to reconceive both “humanity” and “rationality” in more inclusive ways?³⁴ What other resources does the past offer for insulating these concepts from misuse? This is one reason for the importance of historical projects like this book.

33 Cf. Sally Haslanger, “Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?,” *Noûs* 34 (2000): 31–55.

34 Cf. Witt, “Feminist Metaphysics.”

CHAPTER I

Plato and the Pleonectic Conception of Human Nature

Rachana Kamtekar

Inquiry into human nature took a distinctive turn in fifth-century BCE Athens with the articulation of a *pleonectic conception of human nature* (named after Greek *pleonexia*, wanting to have more and more).¹ On this view, expressed by some of the so-called amoralist characters in Plato's dialogues such as Callicles and Thrasymachus, and outside Plato by the sophist Antiphon and in some of the speeches in Thucydides' history, it is human nature to try to maximize our possession of what is advantageous to us, and to be limited in this endeavor only by our own powers to get—that is, by the de facto limits on our strength, intelligence, courage, and so on. I will describe how Plato's conception of human nature, often thought to differ from the

¹ A rich and suggestive account of the links between *pleonexia* and Athenian democracy among fifth- and fourth-century intellectuals is to be found in Ryan K. Balot, *Greed and Injustice in Classical Athens* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

pleonectic conception only over *what* is good (wisdom and virtue rather than bodily goods) but not over whether maximizing our possession of good things is natural or indeed rational, responds to the pleonectic conception.

In brief, I will argue that in the *Gorgias*, Plato suggests that the pleonectic conception is the conception of human nature assumed by the practitioners of rhetoric, the so-called expertise in mass persuasion, and contrasts it with a conception that treats human nature as a part of cosmic nature; in the *Phaedrus*, he argues that rhetoric's persuasive ends would be better achieved by replacing its conception of human nature, based on what seems to be likely (*eikos*), with a true conception of the different types of human characters (first section). In the *Republic*, Plato develops an account of human nature as complex, having rational as well as nonrational motivational and cognitive capacities, to show how it may be perfected by justice and law rather than being hampered by them as on the pleonectic conception (second section). This is because our rational nature seeks to know the truth, which is limited and orderly, and to produce good and beautiful things in accordance with this knowledge (third section).

THE PLEONECTIC CONCEPTION OF HUMAN NATURE AND RHETORIC

Let us begin with some examples of the pleonectic conception before turning to Plato's response.² In *Truth*, Antiphon opposes human nature (*physis*) to law (or convention, *nomos*), where what is

² A modern analogue would be the way that liberal economics and liberal political theory assume that human beings are rational and self-interested. Some liberals think that this is the truth about human nature independently of the disciplines of economics and politics; others think that these are the least controversial, minimal assumptions to make about human beings; still others think that the disciplines have predictive and planning power with just these assumptions about human nature.

natural is a set of powers and constraints universal to and necessary for all humans:

We can examine those attributes of nature that are necessarily in all men and are provided to all to the same degree, and in these respects none of us is distinguished as foreign or Greek. For we all breathe the air through our mouth and through our nostrils, and we laugh when we are pleased in our mind or we weep when we are pained, and we take in sounds with our hearing and we see by the light with our sight, and we work with our hands and we walk with our feet. . . . They agreed. . . .³ Justice is not violating the rules of the city in which one is a citizen. (Antiphon, *Truth* 7a–7b)⁴

Justice, Antiphon continues, is following the laws of one's community, which is to one's advantage only insofar as law-following avoids punishment for violating the law—which is sometimes achievable by avoiding detection:

thus a person would best use justice to his own advantage if he considered the laws important when witnesses are present, but the consequences of nature important in the absence of witnesses. For the requirements of the laws are supplemental but the requirements of nature are necessary; and the requirements of nature are natural and not by agreement (7b).

Although Antiphon's main point is to contrast law or justice with nature, his treatment also identifies a way in which our relationship to both is the same: just as we should recognize that the attributes of nature—breathing through our mouth and nostrils, working with our

³ The ellipsis marks some missing columns that probably contained a history of human beings and the institution of laws by agreement.

⁴ Translation from Michael Gagarin and Paul Woodruff, *Early Greek Political Thought from Homer to the Sophists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

hands—present us with opportunities as well as limitations, we should recognize that the law not only limits but also enables our pursuit of our advantage because the laws need only limit our conduct when others can find out about our violations.

Is our advantage-seeking itself natural? In what survives of the text of *Truth*, Antiphon does not say so in so many words, but in observing that the attributes of nature and law constrain our advantage-seeking in different ways, Antiphon seems to take advantage-seeking itself as a given, and to be without any internal limit; further, he seems to acknowledge no other human motivation than advantage-seeking and its converse, disadvantage-avoidance.

That advantage-seeking without limit is natural is claimed explicitly by some of the speakers in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*. For example, the Athenians argue that the Melians, who wish to remain neutral in the war, should surrender to them; to the Melians' appeal to justice (5.86), they reply dismissively: "let's work out what we can do on the basis of what both sides truly accept: we both know that decisions about justice are made in human discussions only when both sides are under equal compulsion; but *when one side is stronger, it gets as much as it can*, and the weak must accept that" (5.89, my emphasis).⁵ The Athenians clearly subscribe to the pleonec-tic conception of human nature. That the Melians continue to appeal to justice, fairness, friendship, and the common good (90–96), arguing that the Athenians' behavior will discredit them in the eyes of others and turn these others into enemies of the Athenians too (98), indicates that at least the Melians do not (even though the Athenians say they do). When the Melians say the gods will be on their side because of their innocence and justice (104), the Athenians reply: "*nature always compels gods (we believe) and men (we are certain) to rule over anyone they can control*" (105; my emphasis).⁶ If nature *compels*

5 All Thucydides quotations are from Gagarin and Woodruff 1995.

6 The Athenians appeal to the same view of human nature in defending their imperialist actions to the Spartans early in the book (1.76).

pleonectic behavior, and if pleonectic behavior is *natural* behavior, then it would seem to be unapt for criticism. The Athenians close by deriding the folly of the Melians' deliberation on the basis of considerations of honor (111) and warn them against staking everything on hope, good fortune, and the Spartans (113).⁷ According to the Athenians, since we (human beings) pursue our own advantage as far as possible, and are limited in this pursuit only by our relative powerlessness, the Melians should determine their best course of action on the assumption that the Athenians and they are both seeking their own maximum advantage.

Although the Athenians describe their own argument as "persuasive and unanswerable" (85), it fails to persuade the Melians, with the result that the Athenians go on to besiege and capture the city and then kill all the adult men and enslave the women and children. So it is not obvious that Thucydides is presenting their speech as an example of successful rhetoric or endorsing their conception of human nature. Still, Thucydides' Melian debate suggests that although it is not subscribed to by everyone, the pleonectic conception is held by some to be an especially powerful basis for making persuasive arguments.

The group most likely to hold this were practitioners of rhetoric, an expertise that emerged around the fifth century BCE when democratic Athens provided novel circumstances for persuasive speech addressed to mass audiences of unfamiliar. Increasingly radical democratic reforms—such as the determination of the membership of the Council, the city's agenda-setting body, by lot, and the compensation for a day's jury duty or assembly participation by a day's wages—encouraged all free adult males born of Athenian parents to participate in government; the resulting diversity among citizens whose vote would count sent would-be political leaders looking for ways to influence hearts

7 At the outset of his book, Thucydides says that when he recounts speeches, his reports try to preserve the gist of what was said and to say what the situation demanded, as he cannot remember the exact words that were spoken (1.22). Saying what the situation demanded would require some theoretical commitments about what audiences would find persuasive.

and minds across economic and educational differences.⁸ Gorgias, one of those who claimed to teach the expertise in persuasive speaking to mass audiences, dubbed it “rhetoric” (the expertise of the *rhetor*, or public speaker).⁹

Practitioners of rhetoric must make assumptions about their audiences’ sympathies, interests, knowledge, capacities, and so on, to determine what they will find persuasive. In Plato’s *Gorgias*, Socrates contrasts rhetoric with his own method of persuading people one by one on the basis of what each of them believes (471e–72c). But the expert in rhetoric Polus claims to know that everyone believes, even when they deny it (471e; see 461b–c, 466b), that it is a great thing to be able to practice injustice with impunity (470c–71d). (Polus’ claim echoes that of the Athenians in the Melian dialogue: that it is true not only that by nature people seek their own advantage without regard to justice when it’s in their power to do so but also that everyone knows this truth.) Polus’ successor in argument in the *Gorgias*, Callicles, offers an argument that such advantage-seeking is not only natural but also just:

by nature all that is worse is also more shameful, like suffering what’s unjust. . . . No man would put up with suffering what’s unjust; only a slave would do so, one who is better dead than alive. (482a–b)

Nature itself reveals that it’s a just thing for the better man and the more capable man to have a greater share than the worse man and the less capable man. Nature shows that this is so in many places: both among the other animals and in whole cities and races of men, it shows that this is what justice has been decided to be: that

8 For the development of rhetoric in relation to these changed political circumstances, see W. R. Connor, *The New Politicians of Fifth-Century Athens* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992); Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1989).

9 Plato, *Gorgias* 449a5.

the superior rule the inferior and have a greater share than they.
(483d, tr. Zeyl)¹⁰

In other words, according to Callicles we can see, by observing nature in spheres where law has not been instituted (e.g. among animals and in the relations between states), what is by nature [just],¹¹ which is that the strong have power over the weak and have greater shares of what's good than the weak. Legal justice puts a brake on the strong's power and protects the weak's possession of goods; natural justice coincides with natural advantage and disadvantage.

Callicles is not the first to speak of a kind of justice in nature. The one surviving fragment of Anaximander (d. c. 546 BCE) already describes natural phenomena in terms suggesting a just order: "the things that exist perish into the things out of which they come to be according to necessity, for they pay penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice in accordance with the ordering of time" (in Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle's "Physics"* 24.13–21).¹² But while Anaximander's natural justice corrects injustice (scholars suppose these to be, for example, the seasons' successive excesses of heat and cold, wet and dry), Callicles' natural justice *is* the very overreaching, excessive, pleonectic behavior previously called "injustice." As Socrates observes in response to Callicles' ideal of maximizing pleasure, Callicles doesn't recognize that nature involves a world *order*:

This [i.e., self-control and justice] is the target which I think one should look to in living, and in his actions he should direct all of

¹⁰ All translations of Plato are from John Cooper and Doug Hutchinson, eds., *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997); individual translators in this volume are cited after the quoted passages.

¹¹ It's a good question why natural justice is a conception of justice at all; at *Laws* 690d Plato lists several types of superiority (strength, wisdom, age, etc.) that are considered entitlements (*axiômata*) to rule.

¹² Translation Kirk, Raven and Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge, 1983).

his own affairs and those of his city to the end that justice and self-control will be present in one who is to be blessed. He should not allow his appetites to be undisciplined or undertake to fill them up—that's interminably bad—and live the life of a marauder. Such a man could not be dear to another man or to a god, for he cannot be a partner, and where there's no partnership there's no friendship. Yes, Callicles, wise men claim that partnership and friendship, orderliness, self-control, and justice hold together heaven and earth, and gods and men, and that is why they call this universe a world order, my friend, and not an undisciplined world-disorder. I believe that you don't pay attention to these facts, even though you're a wise man in these matters. You've failed to notice that proportionate equality has great power among both gods and men, and you suppose that you ought to practice getting the greater share. That's because you neglect geometry. (*Gorgias* 507e–8a)

Callicles is mistaken not only in aiming at the wrong substantive end—appetitive gratification—but also in thinking that the happy human being is the one who gets the greater share. He makes the latter mistake because he fails to understand that the world is an ordered whole, and apparently geometry would help him to understand how it is an ordered whole (more on this later). A modern philosopher might wonder why an order couldn't emerge from the competition between overreachers who seek more and more without limit, or why public virtue couldn't emerge from private vice. But in fifth and fourth centuries BCE Athens, even the advocates of *pleonexia* suppose that any order produced by the rule of the strong must be top-down, and even the natural philosophers who suppose that an orderly cosmos emerged from the random motion of atoms suppose that orderly human arrangements are the result of their deliberate decisions (*Laws* 10.888–909a; see Critias, *Sisyphus*).

In the *Gorgias*, while Callicles regards rhetoric as a powerful aide to the pursuit of pleasure that is natural to human beings, Socrates

suggests that rhetorical education ends up defaulting to a popular conception of what is good for human beings—and thus of what human nature seeks—because it never asks the question *What is good?*¹³ Plato's *Phaedrus* has more to say about why such defaulting happens.

The Likely (Eikos)

So far I have shown that according to Plato a speaker to a mass audience must make assumptions about his audience's cognitive and motivational states and capacities and that rhetoric as practiced by some, at least, assumes that human beings are pleonectic by nature. In the *Phaedrus* Plato flags some of rhetoric's assumptions about human nature and proposes an alternative conception of it on which to base speeches better suited to persuading people (one by one, as in Socrates' practice, rather than en masse).

In the course of enumerating the parts of rhetoric, Socrates reports that the founders of rhetoric, Tisias and Gorgias, put forward the likely (*eikos*), that is, what seems likely to people, as more important to their expertise than the true *Phaedrus* (267a–b, 272e–73a). He illustrates the consequences of arguing on the basis of what is likely:

Tisias wrote that if a weak but spunky man is taken to court because he beat up a strong but cowardly one and stole his cloak or something else, neither one should tell the truth. The coward must say that the spunky man didn't beat him up all by himself, while the latter must rebut this by saying that only the two of them were there, and fall back on that well-worn plea "How could a man like me attack a man like him?" The strong man, naturally, will not admit his cowardice but will try to invent some other lie, and may thus give

13 In my essay "The Profession of Friendship: Callicles, Democratic Politics, and Rhetorical Education in Plato's *Gorgias*," *Ancient Philosophy* (2005): 319–39, I argue that in the *Gorgias* Socrates shows Callicles to have ended up with the default/popular view that the good is pleasure as a result of Gorgias' rhetorical education having left unexamined the content of advantage.

his opponent the chance to refute him. (273b–c, tr. Nehamas and Woodruff)

In the law court and assembly the orator must persuade citizens about what is likely to have happened in the past or to happen in the future.¹⁴ This necessarily involves speculation on the basis of assumptions about what people are like, how they respond to various circumstances, and so on. But if the criterion of the likely is not the true but rather what seems likely to the audience, then these assumptions will come from the audience's prior beliefs about what motivates actions, how people respond to various circumstances, and so on. So the Athenian orator will have to study the opinions about human nature held by the people who make up the assembly and jury, and to argue on the assumption that they are correct.

Plato's characterization of arguments based on the likely is borne out by the case of Gorgias' showpiece *Defense of Palamedes*, in which, after arguing that he *could* not have committed the treasonous act of which he is accused, Gorgias argues (in Palamedes' voice) that he *would* not have:

I wouldn't have committed treason except for a large payment which I couldn't have concealed (9–10). . . . I had no plausible motive to betray the Greeks: no-one undertakes risks except for great benefits, but think of the possible benefits—becoming tyrant? Impossible for me (13–14). Money? I have sufficient wealth given my needs (15). Honor? Wickedness doesn't bring honor (16). Security or helping friends and harming enemies? Treason brings about the very opposite (17–18). Only two motives lie behind every human action: either to gain profit or avoid loss. To commit a crime for any other

14 E.g., Hecuba's speech to Agamemnon against Polymnestor uses *eikos* (*Hecuba* 1102–11); Hecuba and Agamemnon call Polymnestor's appeal slick/nimble "rhetoric" (1156, 1214).

reason is madness (19). (Gorgias, *Defense of Palamedes*, in Gagarin and Woodruff 1995, my paraphrase)

These arguments make the very strong assumption (as the summing-up at 19 makes explicit) that our actions are *only* motivated by profit and loss-avoidance. In the absence of certain proof or eyewitnesses, it is this assumption that allows Palamedes to make arguments about what it's reasonable to believe happened. We may think that when we are trying to predict or influence the behavior of a group of people, factors like character and motive, which can vary a great deal from person to person, are not very useful (contributing to what contemporary social scientists call "noise"); alternatively, we might think it more prudent to assume the worst about people so as to minimize risk to ourselves. Yet even if we agree with this as a general account of human motivation, when we have specific knowledge about people's characters or motives we allow that knowledge to override the general account.

In the *Phaedrus* Socrates proposes an alternative way to think about human nature (presumably for one-on-one persuasion):

anyone . . . who teaches the art of rhetoric seriously will, first, describe the soul with absolute precision and enable us to understand what it is: whether it is one and homogeneous by nature or takes many forms. . . . Second, he will explain how, in virtue of its nature, it acts and is acted upon by certain things. . . . Third, he will classify the kinds of speech and of soul there are, as well as the various ways in which they are affected, and explain what causes each. He will then coordinate each kind of soul with the kind of speech appropriate to it. And he will give instructions concerning the reasons why one kind of soul is necessarily convinced by one kind of speech while another necessarily remains unconvinced. (271a–b)

Here Socrates adds to his contrast between the likely and what actually happens the point that what happens varies *due to differences in psychic*

qualities or types of soul—and identifies the latter as crucial for an expert in his kind of rhetoric to know about.¹⁵ (In addition to requiring knowledge of human nature and human characters, Socrates also proposes that rhetoric needs dialectic, which allows its practitioner a grasp of the truth (about, for example, the just and the unjust), and thereby the ability to diverge from it by the smallest increments in order to persuade [262b].)¹⁶ It's to those who are ignorant of the different types of soul that it will not seem that a spunky but weak man could have robbed a cowardly but strong man. Without knowledge of the differences among souls, assuming that all souls are alike,¹⁷ what seems likely is that strength alone determines who could have robbed whom—the different aims and abilities or limitations of different souls just will not come up. This is the same assumption that lies behind Callicles' claim in the *Gorgias* that it is the weak who praise justice: the amoralist thinks that only the fear of being detected and punished for injustice keeps (nonmad) citizens from practicing injustice. Plato thinks that being just gives one new reasons to refrain from practicing injustice, and, as I'll now argue, defends being just, and having these reasons, against the charge that justice forces us to act and refrain from acting in ways that are contrary to human nature.

15 The theory of the types of soul and of what type of speech leads each of these to truth is Socrates' answer to the *Gorgias*' criticism that rhetoric relies on experience to achieve its effects and lacks an account of the cause by which it achieves these effects (462c–65a).

16 Aristotle says that what is likely is what is [true] for the most part (*Rhetoric* 1357a35). The *Rhetoric to Alexander* says that there are three things that determine what is (appears?) likely: *pathos* (emotion), *ethos* (character), and *keros* (gain) (1427a28). In "Concerning *Eikos*: Social Expectation and Verisimilitude in Early Attic Rhetoric," *Rhetorica* 26 (2008): 1–29, David Hoffman argues that the core meaning of *eikos* is "resemblance" or "similarity." (In the earliest instances it is written as *eoika* + dative of that-which-is-resembled.) There is a shift in the fifth century away from this to the sense of "befitting," which Hoffman understands as resembling what is socially expected (the just, the fair, the role, the true, etc.); in other words, as I understand it, it comes to mean resemblance to/similarity to some normative standard. The dispute between Socrates/Plato and Tisias/the teachers of rhetoric is (as usual) about whether the normative standard is set by/known to the multitude or only an expert.

17 At *Phaedrus* 263c–64a Socrates criticizes Lysias' speech against love for assuming that love is one thing, that is, for not distinguishing between the types of motivation that characterize human and divine lovers.

THE COMPLEXITY OF HUMAN NATURE

Famously, in Plato's *Republic* Socrates is challenged to show that justice by itself or by its own nature (*kath' hauto*) is better for its possessor than is injustice, even if the social benefits of justice, such as a good reputation, accrue to the unjust person. When Glaucon sets out the challenge, he says that injustice is naturally more advantageous; that we practice justice, which is defined by the conventions or laws to which we have agreed in order not to be harmed by each other, unwillingly, and only because we lack the power to do injustice with impunity (358e–59c); and that only a fool would practice justice if he thought he could do injustice with impunity (360d). Glaucon's challenge assumes that human nature is pleonectic, and that justice and law inhibit the fulfillment of our natural desires. Socrates' answer involves arguing that human nature, in the language of the *Republic* the human soul, is not simple but complex and so prone to internal conflict.¹⁸

Socrates first argues for the complexity of the human soul by applying a *principle of opposites* (PO)—according to which the same thing doesn't do or suffer opposites at the same time, in the same respect, in relation to the same thing—to familiar experiences of conflicting desires. His first argument runs (in my paraphrase):

- (D1) We can have opposite psychological attitudes toward one and the same thing (437b–c).
- (D2) For example, a person who is thirsty wants to drink.
 - a. Insofar as he is thirsty, the thirsty person wants only to drink: if he wants hot or cold drink, or good or bad drink, we have to assign to him another desire, for hot or cold or good or bad, that “qualifies” his thirst. (437d–e)

¹⁸ I discuss the complexity of the soul in greater detail in my *Plato's Moral Psychology: Intellectualism, the Divided Soul and the Desire for Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

- (D3) But sometimes a thirsty person refrains from drinking, for example, if [he believes that] the drink is bad for him.
- (D4) [By PO,] In the thirsty person who refrains from drinking bad drink, the opposite attitudes, “Go for drink!” and “Refrain from drinking!” can’t belong to one and the same thing, so there must be something else in the soul of the thirsty person apart from the desire to drink, another part, which “bids him not to drink” (439c).
- (D5) The desire for drink arises from a bodily condition. (439c)
- (D6) The desire to refrain from drinking arises from calculation. (439c)
- (D7) Therefore, in the soul there is a part that desires on the basis of bodily conditions (call it “the appetitive part”) and another part that desires on the basis of reasoning (call it “the reasoning part”). (439d)¹⁹

The point of this argument is that our desires come from different sources—bodily conditions and reasoning in this case—that may conflict, but for all that are equally due to our nature; it follows from this that conflict with some one of our natural desires will not suffice to prove anything unnatural or compelled, as assumed by Antiphon, Callicles, and Glaucon, for that thing may be in accordance with another of our natural desires. A consequence of blocking the inference from *contrary to a preconventional motivation* to *forced/unnatural* is that we have to look elsewhere than to the behavior of those unaffected by law or convention to determine the recommended conduct for human beings.

¹⁹ It has often been claimed that the point of this argument is to show that there are irrational soul-parts so that it is possible to act contrary to one’s knowledge or belief about what is best, contrary to Socrates’ claim in the *Protagoras* that we always do what we know or believe is best. But what the *Republic* emphasizes is plurality, not irrationality: “if these things happen [i.e., the doing or suffering of opposites in the same respect in relation to the same thing at the same time], *we’ll know it is not [one and] the same thing (t’auton) but many (pleiō)*” (436b; my emphasis).

Plato's argument for a complex soul calls out for an alternative to the sophistic simple-nature view according to which anything that inhibits a natural desire must be unnatural and disadvantageous to us. According to Plato's alternative, there is a natural hierarchy among our natural desires that makes the condition in which reason rules the natural condition for us to be in, and law and justice enable us to achieve this natural condition. Socrates makes the case for the naturalness of reason's rule by analogy with bodily health: "to produce health is to establish the components of the body in a natural relation of control and being controlled, one by another, while to produce disease is to establish a relation of ruling and being ruled contrary to nature . . . Then, *isn't to produce justice to establish the parts of the soul in a natural relation of control*, one by another, while to produce injustice is to establish a relation of ruling and being ruled contrary to nature?" (444d, tr. Grube/Reeve, my emphasis). The natural relation of control is the condition in which the reasoning part rules, the spirited emotional part acts as reason's aide, and the appetitive part is ruled. What makes reason the natural ruler is that it is uniquely equipped to learn the truth, including the truth about the goods sought by naturally inferior soul-parts. In a second argument for the soul's complexity, Socrates considers conflicting cognitions and identifies reason's cognitions as most capable of grasping the truth and so as superior:

- (C1) The same magnitude appears through sight not to be equal close up and far off; the same sticks look bent in the water and straight outside it (*Republic* 602c).
- (C2) Measuring, counting, and weighing help us so that the apparent large or small (etc.) doesn't rule in us but the calculating, measuring, and weighing thing does (602d).²⁰

²⁰ By "rule in us" I suppose Plato means "determine our choices" rather than merely "determine our beliefs," since (C4) says that even after calculating, the soul can have a calculation-opposed belief.

- (C₃) Calculating, measuring, weighing are the work of reasoning (602d).
- (C₄) Often after the reasoning part has calculated, the opposites [either (a) to its calculations, or (b) to the apparently large or small] appear to it [*toutôî*, the reasoning part] (602e2–4).
- (C₅) The same part of us can't believe opposites about the same thing at the same time. (602e).

(Plato may have in mind either [1] that the soul forms [contrary] beliefs on the basis of the appearances and the calculations, or [2] that after calculating, the reasoning part is the subject of new, rational appearances, on the basis of which it forms beliefs, while another part continues to believe contrary to these.)

- (C₆) So the thing that believes contrary to measurement can't be the same as the thing that believes in accordance with measurement. (603a)
- (C₇) That which believes in accordance with measurement is the best thing in us.
- (C₈) That which opposes it is some inferior thing in us. (603a)

By characterizing the reasoning part of the soul as truth-grasping, whether about the truth of some visible magnitude or of the goodness of drinking something, Plato expands the sphere of truth that it is human nature to seek. Whereas Antiphon-Callicles-Glaucon had supposed that it is human nature to desire as much as possible of what is advantageous for us, so that the truths we would seek would subserve this desire, Socrates adds that it is human nature, in particular the nature of our reasoning element, to seek the truth quite generally, including, but not limited to, the truth about what is advantageous for us.

Although each soul-part aims at some good for its subject—for example, appetitive desires aim at things that will restore the body to

a healthy condition, such as drink when the body is thirsty, or sleep when it is tired—only reason is able to know what is good for each part and the whole (441e), so only reason is in a position to determine when it is best to fulfill a given desire and so to allot to each soul-part its best pleasures (586d–e).

But it takes education to get into a condition in which one's reasoning part rules—for one thing, at birth and in early childhood, reason is not yet strong or active enough to rule in us, yet it is during this time that our appetites and emotions can be made receptive or resistant to reason (377a–c, 401d–402a).²¹ And education, as Socrates presents it, is due to law and convention.

MAXIMIZING VERSUS CREATING HARMONIOUS WHOLE

One might think that when reason determines what is best for each soul-part and for the whole soul, what it does is to find the compossible maxima of desire-fulfillment for itself, the appetitive part, and the spirited part. However, when Socrates spells out reason's rule in the city, which is supposed to be analogous to reason's rule in the soul, he subjects desire-fulfillment for each class to additional constraints deriving from that class's function. Thus the law that rules the ideal city rules for the good of the whole city, harmonizing its citizens so that each class confers the benefits it can on the whole (519e–20a). Earlier he has elaborated this idea by means of an analogy:

Suppose, then, that someone came up to us while we were painting a statue and objected that, because we had painted the eyes (which are the most beautiful part) black rather than purple, we had not applied the most beautiful colors to the most beautiful parts of the

21 By this point Glaucon has already acknowledged—in objecting that Socrates' simple city, since it fulfills only citizens' economic needs, is a city fit only for pigs (372d–e)—that some of the things we desire and are committed to going on desiring are the products of convention (*haper nomizetai*, 372d8).

statue. We'd think it reasonable to offer the following defense: "You mustn't expect us to paint the eyes so beautifully that they no longer appear to be eyes at all, and the same with the other parts. Rather you must look to see whether by dealing with each part appropriately, we are making the whole statue beautiful." (420b–c)

The reason not to paint the eyes of the statue purple even though purple is the most beautiful color is that eyes aren't purple, and a beautiful human form has to include eyes. Similarly, Socrates argues, a law-giver does not make one class outstandingly happy as they might be at a festival, for the reason that enjoying the happiness that belongs to a festival doesn't contribute to making a city in the way that performing a function such as farming or making pots does (420b–21c). In *Republic* 10, Socrates generalizes: the virtue, beauty, and correctness of *any* artifact, animal, or action depends on the use for which it is made or naturally suited (601d). So, it would seem, given that human appetites and emotions and reason all have a functional role to play in a human life, the desire-fulfillment or pleasure that rational rule pursues for each part can't just be a response to each part's desires but must consider what conduces to or interferes with each part's performing its function. Socrates' frequent claim that what reason's rule does is to *harmonize* the parts it rules includes not only the thought that one part may not enjoy greater happiness at the cost of another part's happiness but also the thought that each part must continue to perform its function for the sake of the whole.

The *Timaeus* uses the same idea to explicate reason's rule of the cosmos: to make the cosmos as beautiful as possible, the creator, who is intelligence (*nous*) personified, combines its ingredients in harmonic ratios to make living things, starting with the heavenly bodies. Perfecting the whole (in this case the whole cosmos) requires the creation of some parts that are imperfect considered by themselves—mortal animals, for example, and among these, grazing animals, bottom-feeding aquatic animals, and so on—for a world containing

all of these is more perfect than one lacking even the worst of them. When we consider these animals in isolation, we may think that they would be better off if they could break out of the bounds of their very limited capacities, but the correct way to think of these animals is in terms of how they function as parts of a whole that they make as good and beautiful as possible. At the most abstract level of description, the *Philebus* characterizes the work of intelligence as the imposition of a limit or measure or number on the unlimited (purely relative being, which Socrates describes as the domain of the more or less, for example hotter or colder, wetter or dryer) to create living things whose well-being is a certain proportion or harmony—but not a maximum (23c–27c).

What explains intelligence's production of proportional, harmonious wholes (rather than maxima) is something about the nature of the truth. In the *Republic*, Socrates says that philosophers, who both know and admire the Forms, cannot but imitate them, and when compelled to rule, cannot but try to craft what they rule in their image (500c–d). Similarly, in the *Timaeus* the creator makes the world in the image of an intelligible rather than sensible model because he wants to make it as good as possible (30c–d). This involves making material things—starting with the primary solids, earth, water, air, and fire—out of proportional combinations of their ingredients (31b–32c, 53c–56b). In general an expertise aims to improve its object—rather than its practitioner, as Thrasyarchus supposed—because it is an expertise rather than a lack (*Republic* 346e–47a, 428c–d; *Timaeus* 29e–30a; see also *Gorgias* 490b–c, *Philebus* 28e, *Laws* 900d–903e). Further, in no branch of knowledge does one knowledgeable person want to outdo (*pleonektein*) other knowledgeable people or do anything different from other knowledgeable people—which is why the unjust person, who wants to outdo other unjust people (others like him), isn't like the clever and good person, but like the ignorant and foolish one (350a–c). So it seems that the maximizing aim assumed by the pleonectic conception of human

nature is quite unlike Plato's explicit conception of expertise and wisdom, rationality's excellences.

Still, one might object, Plato's talk of perfecting and making things as good or beautiful or happy as possible suggests that he thinks of reason's work as maximizing a thing's possession of what's good. The *Republic* says the aim of the law is to make the city as happy/good as possible (420b, 519e–20e), and the rule of reason is to enable all the soul-parts to enjoy the truest and best pleasures possible for them (586d–e); the *Timaeus* says the creator wanted to make the world as good as possible (29e–30a). Doesn't this show that while Plato rejects the amorality's idea that it is natural, and rational, for us to seek as much pleasure or power as possible, he accepts the form of that idea, and, because he agrees that it is natural and rational for us to seek as much happiness as possible and believes that happiness depends on virtue, argues that we should seek as much virtue as possible?

This is not the correct way to understand Plato's superlatives. In the *Philebus*, Socrates argues that we would be wrong to choose as most worthy for human beings any life that only maximizes some first-order good such as pleasure or knowledge (21a–c). This is because the good is perfect and sufficient (20d), so that the good life for us is not lacking in anything that brings a human being into, and maintains her in, the condition of harmony that is her particular mixture of limit and unlimited. This is not a life into which no further good could be introduced but one into which no further good need be. But if this is true, our happiness is limited not only by weaknesses or deficiencies in our abilities to procure the means of happiness, as Callicles said, but by our very nature: there may be many good things, some possession of which is good for us, but more possession of which makes no difference to our happiness, or even detracts from it. The limits of our nature might make it the case that our happiness, to be perfect, requires goods in limited amounts. Socrates' treatment of bodily pleasures in the *Philebus* illustrates this well: he claims that a bodily pleasure like

that of drinking is our awareness of our body being restored from depletion (which we experience as thirst) of liquid to its natural, undepleted condition, so that drinking past the point when our thirst is quenched is no longer pleasant—but this is not a deficiency in us; it is just our nature. To maximize the pleasure of drinking we'd have to engage in thirst-causing activities, but this would also involve increasing the pain of thirst in our lives. By contrast, not being thirsty, a condition due to the body's being in its natural harmonious condition, is an instance of sufficiency. Similarly, the human eye, a product of divine intelligence, is not designed to maximize seeing, so that we see as much as possible, but to enable us to see the heavenly bodies so that when by understanding their rational movements we become rational ourselves (*Timaeus* 45b–47c). Given their function, our eyes would not be better if they also saw atomic structures; indeed, they might be worse since studying these structures, which are less perfect considered by themselves than are the heavenly bodies, might misdirect our intellectual attention.

If it is insisted that when the addition of further goods would not be good *for* the life in question, we should consider the maximum to be the point of goodness-for-that-life-that-cannot-be-exceeded, then we should distinguish a stricter and a looser sense of maximizing, and note that in the looser sense, satisficing, or choosing something good enough rather than pursuing what is best because of the costs to time and energy of determining what is best, would also count as achieving a maximum of something, for example efficiency. In addition, while it is possible to say “maximize virtue,” as if virtue is an item whose quantity may come in degrees of more or less like pleasure or wealth, the fact that Plato conceives of virtue in terms of proportion and harmony raises a question about what this would mean: how is a mathematical proportion to be maximized?

Contemporary philosophers sometimes evaluate a life not only in terms of the amount of good it has in it but also in terms of its

shape—for example, it's often said that a life that starts out badly but ends well is a better life than one that starts out well but ends badly, and some philosophers take this as evidence that the goodness of a life is not simply an additive function of the goodness of its constituent episodes but is affected by the way these episodes fit into a narrative, or by the proximity of good or bad episodes to the prime of life.²² In the *Republic* Socrates says we should make our choices in life taking into consideration how such assets as beauty, wealth, birth, office, strength, ease of learning, and different conditions of soul interact with one another in conducing to a just or unjust life (618c–d); in the *Philebus* he describes a good life as constituted by a mixture of (1) knowledge (both the kind that is most precise because unmixed with any ignorance, i.e., dialectic, and the kinds that are less precise because based on experience and so mixed with ignorance, e.g. carpentry and music) and (2) pleasures that are pure (or unmixed with pain, i.e., independent of pain for their pleasantness) and true (corresponding in their report of how pleasant something is to how much pleasure—and not just relief from pain—that thing actually brings). On both accounts the good life is one in which good ingredients are combined in such proportions as to produce a harmony: in the *Republic*, justice or virtue is a harmony; in the *Philebus*, both the condition of virtue and the natural bodily condition to which we are returned in pleasant experiences are a harmony. These remarks suggest that in the contemporary shape-of-life debate, Plato not only would have taken a nonadditive view of the goodness of a life but also would have specified a distinctive nonadditive consideration for the evaluation of a life, namely, its harmony.

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22. A useful discussion of various accounts of the uphill-downhill contribution to the goodness of a life is to be found in Joshua Glasgow, "The Shape of Life and the Value of Loss and Gain," *Philosophical Studies* 162 (2013): 665–82.

Evrigenis, Eric Schliesser, Ursula Renz, and Kate Withy, and for comments on the penultimate version to an audience at a Jawaharlal Nehru University Philosophy Seminar in January 2018, especially Kranti Saran. And a big thanks to Shaun Nichols for talking through the ideas in the last section of the essay as they evolved.

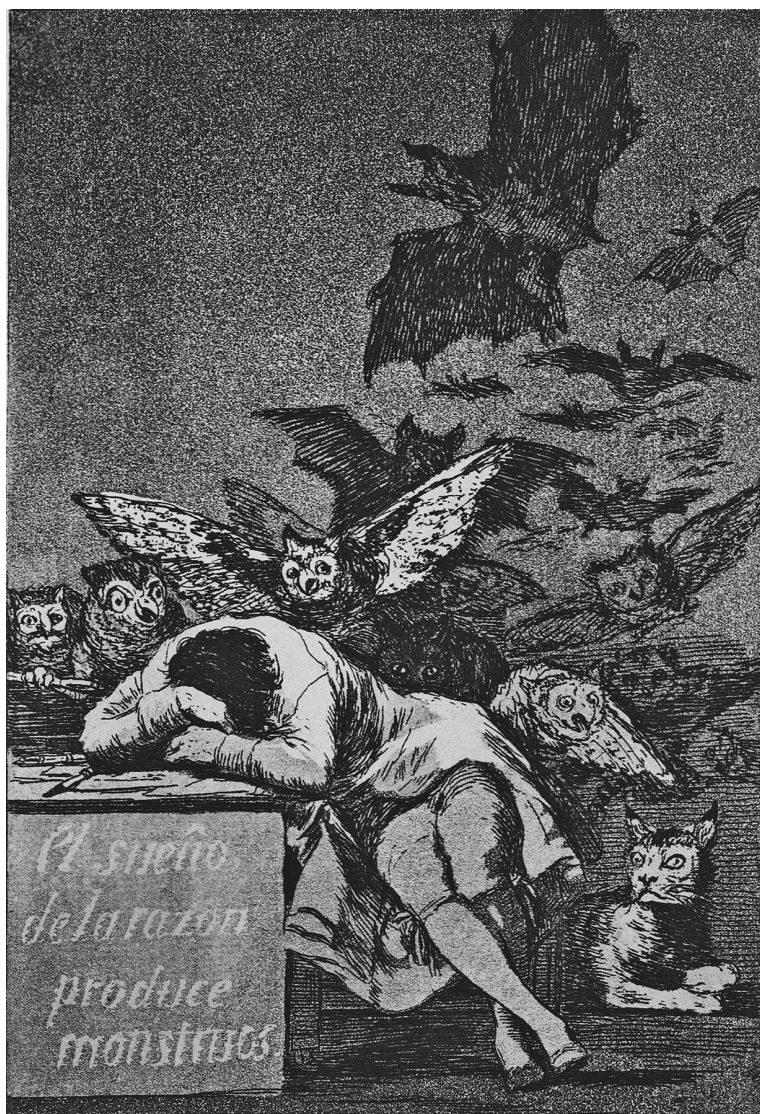


FIGURE 2 Francisco Goya, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* (ca. 1799)

CHAPTER 2

Aristotle's Human Beings

Marguerite Deslauriers and Zoli Filotas

Aristotle is famous—or perhaps it would be better to say notorious—for arguing that rationality is the essence that defines us as human beings. He follows this commitment to the conclusion that the reclusive, leisured life of a philosopher realizes human potential more fully than any other. To modern readers his position may seem hopelessly narrow, notable mainly for what—and for whom—it excludes. In this essay we will not exactly defend Aristotle, but we will suggest that exclusivity and narrowness are the wrong charges to level against him. In fact, the most remarkable feature of Aristotle's account of humanity may well be its capaciousness and flexibility. Aristotle works hard to show that the motley lives of the shoemaker, the soldier, the slave, and the mother are rational in various ways, and that they are all therefore human, notwithstanding their distance from (and inferiority to) the life of the philosopher. We will also show how, in discussing the

various ways of being human, Aristotle highlights how much we have in common with other living beings. Although he famously contrasts human beings with two sorts of living thing—beasts on the one hand and gods on the other—with whom he thinks we cohabit the cosmos, he is nonetheless committed to a striking kinship between human rationality and the cognitive activities of both.

Aristotle has a great deal to say about human beings—far more than we can discuss here. Among many other things, he comments on the types of human personality, on why most people are right handed, on our capacity to produce and appreciate literature, and on human embryology.¹ Our focus in this essay is Aristotle's account of human beings as rational, and the different ways human beings satisfy this definition.

CHARACTERIZING HUMANS AS RATIONAL

The Function Argument

Aristotle's treatises on ethics and politics, which he occasionally assigns jointly to the "philosophy of human affairs" (*EN* X.9, 1181b15) belong more precisely to the discipline he calls "practical philosophy" or just "politics."² The basic objects of this discipline are not humans per se but rather "the noble things and the just things," like glorious deaths in battle, magnificent civic feasts, and so on (*EN* I.3, 1094b14; *EN* I.5, 1095b4–5). One of the main burdens of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is to persuade the wealthy, politically ambitious young men who make their way to Aristotle's lectures that if they care about *those* heterogeneous goods they should also

¹ The volume *Aristotle's Anthropology*, edited by Geert Keil and Nora Kreft (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), appeared too late for us take into consideration the arguments of its contributions. Those interested in Aristotle's conception of human beings will find it a useful resource.

² *Aristotelis: Ethica Nicomachea*, ed. Ingram Bywater (Oxford: Clarendon, 1920); *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Sarah Broadie, ed. Christopher Rowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Henceforth, *EN*. Unless otherwise noted, translations are adapted from Broadie and Rowe. The phrase "philosophy of human affairs" is taken from Rakhman's translation.

find their way to understanding the “highest good” that underlies all of them. That good—however obscure it may initially be—will provide them with a target to aim at whenever they do anything.

It is to help his readers see this target that Aristotle turns to human beings as such, in the “function argument” (*EN* I.7 1097a15–b21). Aristotle there characterizes human beings not by describing what they are like but rather by considering what they can and should do.³ He points out that doctors, flute-players, and other specialists have characteristic functions (*erga*, perhaps better translated as “jobs” or “tasks”). A doctor’s *ergon* is to eliminate disease, a flute-player’s *ergon* is to play the flute, and so on. Such functions define not only what it means to be a member of a group or category—what it is, for example, to be a doctor—but also how to succeed in that capacity, how to be a *good* member of that group.

Aristotle holds that every plant, animal, and artifact is distinguished according to its function, and so proposes (contentiously enough, though he finds it nearly obvious) that there must likewise be an *ergon* for human beings as such. That is, there must be an activity such that whenever human beings perform it consistently and well, their lives are ipso facto successful. The human function, he says, must be some activity that is not shared with plants and nonhuman animals but peculiar to us. And this, he says, shows that the human function is “some activity of that which has rationality” (*EN* I.7 1098a3).⁴ A few refinements lead to his full definition of the human good: a complete *life* (as opposed to some set of isolated episodes) dedicated to the *activity* (not just the unrealized potential) of the part of the soul that actively *thinks* (rather than merely obeys rationality), and one characterized by the

3 This is a general methodological precept for Aristotle. “Everything,” he says, “is defined by its function and its capacity” (*Pol.* I.2 1253a23). *Aristotelis: Politica*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957) *Aristotle’s Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), henceforth *Pol.* Unless otherwise noted, translations are adapted from Lord.

4 We will show throughout this essay that Aristotle’s restriction of rationality to human beings is not as simple as it appears at this early stage of the argument.

virtues of that soul-part (which turn out to be Aristotle's catalogue of moral and intellectual virtues).

There has been an enormous amount of scholarly debate about each element of this definition and about how—or whether—Aristotle's highly compressed argument supports it.⁵ But we would like to leave all that to one side and to broach Aristotle's conception of humanity simply by asking what the rational activities turn out to be. The answer proves complicated because the rational part of the soul does not just have one activity. We will begin by focusing on two rational activities, *theôria* (contemplation) and *phronêsis* (practical wisdom), the second of which can itself be understood under two different aspects. These rational activities differ a great deal one from another, but they share one central feature: each gives human beings access to the good that is proper to a particular part of their environment.

The Soul and its Parts

We have said that for Aristotle rationality is an activity of the rational part of the soul. This presupposes a distinct view of both what the soul is and what parts it may have. For Aristotle, the soul is both the form of the living body (that is, the functional organization that distinguishes a living body from, say, an inanimate heap of flesh, blood, and bone) and the essential cause of the movements, the changes, and more generally the properties of such a body. It follows that every living thing has a soul, including plants, nonhuman animals, and perhaps gods. Aristotle says little about the souls of gods (he laments that we can know very little about them; *PA* I.5, 644b32), but he takes pains to describe the psychological capacities of the various living things on

5 Important recent interventions include Samuel Baker, "The Concept of *Ergon*: Towards an Achievement Interpretation of Aristotle's 'Function Argument,'" *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 48 (2015): 227–66; and Rachel Barney, "Aristotle's Argument for a Human Function," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 34 (2008): 293–320. Both include abundant references to the earlier literature.

earth.⁶ On the account in his treatise *On the Soul*, its capacities are arranged into a hierarchy. The lowest is responsible for nutrition and reproduction, and is shared by all living embodied beings, including plants. Animals and people also have a sensitive faculty, which is itself complex, incorporating the individual senses. Next after sensation in the hierarchy is imagination (a faculty responsible for a number of activities, including memory and planning). Finally, human beings are bestowed with a faculty of rationality, which neither nonhuman animals nor plants have. Even those soul faculties that are shared across the classes of living beings are in a way different in each, because of differences in the demands of the lives of these different classes and the organs of their bodies designed to support those lives. So, for example, because human beings have a rational faculty, their sensitive faculty may be different from that of animals.

In sketching Aristotle's conception of humanity it will be useful to begin, as it were, at the top since the higher capacities may affect the lower ones. We will first discuss the highest and most distinctively rational operations of the human soul as he describes these in his ethics; later we will turn to the way rationality shapes some of the lower parts, and the ways the composite human soul situates human beings in Aristotle's philosophy of nature.

Contemplating the Divine: Theôria

The rational part of the soul can itself be divided into even smaller parts. The very highest of those is intelligence or intellect (*nous*). This is for Aristotle the most rational part of a human being because it is

⁶ We adopt the standard abbreviations for Aristotle's biological works: *DA* for *On the Soul*, *DM* for the *Movement of Animals*, *GA* for the *Generation of Animals*, *HA* for the *History of Animals*, and *PA* for the *Parts of Animals*. Translations in the Loeb editions: W. S. Hett, *Aristotle: On the Soul. Parva Naturalia. On Breath*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), *Aristotle: Parts of Animals. Movement of Animals. Progression of Animals*, ed. A. L. Peck and E. S. Forster, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937), *Aristotle: History of Animals*, ed. A. L. Peck and D. M. Balme, Loeb Classical Library, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965, 1970, 1991).

equipped to engage with the best, most divine things in the universe. Aristotle's word for this activity is *theôria*, normally but not very helpfully translated as "reflection" or "contemplation." In normal Greek usage, a *theôros* is a pilgrim or an emissary to religious festivals and other events. To "theorize" is thus to behold a sacred spectacle after leaving behind the humdrum surroundings of day-to-day life.⁷ Aristotle, however, follows Plato in thinking that the proper objects of *theôria* cannot be the anthropomorphic and sometimes vulgar depictions of gods at religious festivals; rather they must be the loftier objects studied by scientists or philosophers. For Aristotle, these include the stars and other celestial bodies, moving in perfect circles for eternity and (better yet) the necessary and eternal causes that explain their motions, especially the unchanging "first mover" that is the *telos* of all natural change.⁸ Human beings take their first steps toward this kind of *theôria* by considering the familiar features of day-to-day experience (as Aristotle says, the things "best known to us"), then by moving on to reflection on those things' causes, and then their causes' causes, and so on, until their intellect is finally in position to behold the divine first principles.⁹

This conception of rationality may defy modern readers' expectations in at least two ways. It is standard nowadays to imagine, first, that being rational amounts to performing mental operations on concepts or ideas within the mind (for example by figuring out how to satisfy an appetite, noting the consistency or inconsistency of two propositions, observing the existence of some object, and so on). But while Aristotle thinks rational beings perform such operations all the time, the ideal of *theôria* shows them to be secondary. However crucial inquiry, deliberation, and

7 Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 40–68.

8 For the superlative excellence of celestial beings, see e.g., *Generation of Animals* I.5, *Physics* VIII.6, and *Metaphysics* [*Met.*] XII.6–10. What we describe here is the *theôria* of philosophers, but in *Politics* VIII, Aristotle also stresses that a good city will make it possible for its nonphilosophical citizens to practice a lesser form of *theôria* of their own by attending religious festivals.

9 See, e.g., *EN* I.4 and *Met.* A 1.

other mental operations are to the philosophical life, they are merely *presupposed* by *theôria*; they do not constitute it. To put the point another way, *theôria* is not the *inquiry* that leads to understanding divine objects but rather the stable, unchanging psychic *activity* that becomes possible after inquiry is complete. Likewise—and this is the second important contrast with modern conceptions of rationality—although “rationality” translates *logos*, which can mean such things as “speech,” “argument,” “proof,” and “language” (and indeed we will show that these sorts of *logos* play a vital role in Aristotle’s conception of human nature), the connection between rationality and language is circuitous. The rational soul is not a calculator or the voice with which we speak to ourselves. Rather, it is something like a sense organ—though a special kind that can only be activated after a great deal of work.

Perceiving the Fine: Phronêsis, Part 1

So much then for the very highest human rational activity. The virtue of *phronêsis*, usually translated as “practical wisdom,” has much the same structure as *theôria*, though it deals with less elevated objects.¹⁰ Just as the divine objects of *theôria* (again, such things as eternal causes and principles, the movements of stars, and the first mover) are part of the human environment, and rational activity amounts to engaging with them, *phronêsis* allows us to achieve a cognitive grasp of a certain class of objects. But its domain is the contingent world around us, and particularly the subsection over which we have some control. Seeking the good in this domain is not primarily a matter of apprehending and appreciating the good but rather differently of bringing about good states of affairs (*EN* VI.7, 1141b7–15). It follows that when *phronêsis* is working properly, it leads immediately to action. If you are a virtuous

¹⁰ In fact, Aristotle treats the former as a slightly inferior imitation of the latter. Gabriel Richardson Lear, *Happy Lives and the Highest Good: An Essay on Aristotle's "Nicomachean Ethics."* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.

rational agent, and you see an opportunity for fine action, of course you perform that action without hesitation.

Phronêsis is emphatically not the *only* cognitive capacity creatures use to interact with contingent parts of their environment, and it is not the only source of plans and intentional activity. Rabbits perceive lettuce, desire it, and formulate plans to secure it. Bees, cranes, and other political animals pursue such ends collectively, through the activities of their communities. And human experts can likewise, without demonstrating *phronêsis*, make judgments about how to proceed. For example, a flute-player may know what note should come next in a performance. But such technical expertise cannot yield “all-things-considered” judgments, for example about whether or not it’s a good idea to be playing the flute at all. Such judgments, on Aristotle’s view, require that we apprehend the “the noble things and the just things,” mentioned earlier, like courageous sacrifices and magnificent donations. It is sensitivity to opportunities to pursue those intrinsic, moral goods that defines *phronêsis*.

Infusing Subordinate Soul-Parts with Rationality:

Phronêsis, Part 2

DOMESTICATING ONE’S OWN *ALOGON*

When Aristotle first identifies the human function with rationality, he adds an important detail: there are two parts of the soul that may be called rational, but in different ways. Considering these two parts will illuminate a second aspect of the virtue of *phronêsis*. One (we’ll call it by its Greek name, the *logistikon*) possesses rationality in the sense that it *thinks*; but there is another (the *alogon*), the “nonrational” part (*EN* I.7, 1098a2–4; *EN* I.13, 1102a26–1103a10). The *alogon* (which, in true Aristotelian fashion, can be further subdivided into even further parts, some of which don’t have rationality in any sense) can have a variety of relationships to the *logistikon*. Cases of self-control and weakness of will provide easy examples: if you are tempted not to return a loan

to someone who has forgotten about it, the *alogon* pulls in one direction while the *logistikon* pulls in the other. If you overcome temptation and pay anyway, the *alogon* obeys the *logistikon*. But the best people do even better than that. If you are a virtuous person who would not even consider cheating on debts then your *alogon* has been harmonized with or domesticated by rationality. It is only in this last case, the harmonization or domestication of the *alogon* by the *logistikon*, that we may describe someone as fully rational.

The main thing that *phronêsis* “sees” in any given situation—what Aristotle calls the “practical truth” as opposed to the theoretical truth (*EN* VI.2, 1139a25–30)—directly concerns both appetites like hunger and sexual desire and emotions like fear and anger. If you insult a morally sensitive person, for example, that person perceives *how* angry to be, what *kind* of anger to feel, how *long* to feel it, and so on, all of which contributes to a perfectly appropriate, even beautiful (*kalon*) response.

Aristotle makes it clear that the *logistikon* does not do all the work in these cases. Rather, the *alogon* itself comes to be like a sense organ, receptive to features of the world. For example, if you get angry in the appropriate way, this shows that your *alogon* has (thanks to its domestication by the *logistikon*) perceived the injurious features of a situation. For virtuous agents, experiencing the appropriate appetites is a crucial kind of rational activity. For this reason, Aristotle does not contrast rationality with the emotions; on the contrary, he holds that experiencing emotions can in some circumstances manifest rationality in the highest degree.

DOMESTICATING THE *ALOGA* OF OTHERS

The rational soul can concern itself not only with one's own *alogon* but also with the *aloga* of one's neighbors. Immediately after distinguishing between the two soul-parts, Aristotle writes that “we say that we can ‘have’ the rationality of our father or of our friends.” He continues: “that the *alogon* is in a way persuaded by *logos* is shown by our practice of admonishing people, and all the different forms in which

we reprimand and encourage them. If one should call this too [i.e. responding to the admonishment of others] ‘possessing rationality,’ then the aspect of soul that possesses rationality will also be double in nature: one element of it will have it in the proper sense and in itself, another as something capable of listening [or obeying: *akoustikon*] as if to one’s father” (*EN* I.13, 1102b31–1103a3). This passage shows how freely Aristotle moves between the subordination of the *alogon* by one’s own *logistikon* and subordination of one person’s *alogon* by the *logistikon* of someone else. In his view, the very same phenomena are realized in *intrapsychic* hierarchies and *interpsychic* hierarchies alike, and either can be used to illuminate the other.

Similarly, as Aristotle is exploring deliberation about practical decisions, he points out that when we find something impossible, deliberation stops. That is to say that deliberation concerns only “possibilities” (*dunata*). But he pauses to remind his students that possibilities are *social* phenomena that cannot be identified by looking at an individual in isolation. “Possibilities,” he writes, “are those things that come about through our own agency,” and these notably include things done by our friends. After all, those actions are in a way our own, when their “origin is in us” (*EN* III.3, 1112b28). A few lines later, he provides still another example of this sort of outsourced agency: we often seek out not just instruments or means to our ends, but also “someone through whose agency it could come about” (*EN* III.3, 1112b29–30).¹¹ It emerges from these passages and many other like them that the activities of practical rationality are often performed interpersonally.

Taking stock of the story so far, we are now in a position to distinguish between three paradigmatic cases of rational activity, each of which contributes to a definition of the human being. *Theôria*,

11 ὅτι μὲν δι’ οὗ ὅτε δὲ πῶς ἢ διὰ τίνας. We follow Taylor’s translation. Most translators (e.g. Irwin and Crisp) render διὰ τίνας as “by means of what.” But Taylor plausibly defends the translation above, which as he notes fits nicely with the reference to things done through one’s friends. *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics II–IV*, trans. C. C. W. Taylor, Clarendon Aristotle Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 157.

contemplation, involves reflecting on divine beings. And agents with *phronêsis* will engage successfully with two sorts of external objects: opportunities for moral action on the one hand and reason-receptive parts of the soul (*aloga*) (whether one's own or not) on the other. Rationality activity, then, connects people with their "environment" in a remarkably full-blooded sense, anchoring human beings in divine, physical, moral, and political features of the world.

SITUATING THE HUMAN BETWEEN ANIMAL AND GOD

While rational activities thus characterize human beings, they are not unique to them. Aristotle often situates people as beings between brute animals and gods, drawing distinctions according to the activities of each of these kinds. Beasts, gods, and human beings are all alive, but they differ in significant ways in how they lead their lives—and these differences are critical. In considering how Aristotle conceptualizes these distinctions among living beings, we see more clearly what he believes is characteristic of the human species.

The hierarchy of living things is based first on a distinction between those that move and those that do not; the most divine thing does not move, because it is the end for itself (*DC* II. 12 292b4–6; see also *Met.* XII. 7 1072b7–8). Sublunary living beings, all of which move, are arranged hierarchically according to the variety of their actions—human beings have the greatest variety of actions, followed by animals, and then plants, which "have little action and of one kind only" (*DC* 292b7; see also *PA* II. 10 656a3–13). The variety of actions track the ends, or goods, that are available to mortal beings: because human beings can pursue their ultimate good through a range of subsidiary goods, they are capable of a variety of actions. The lives of nonhuman animals and gods are particularly apt to shed light on human lives because when Aristotle sets out the spectrum of moral conditions, he allows that people can be both bestial and godlike; he has a sense that we can tip over into other kinds of being, either worse or better than

human beings, or rather that we can come to approximate either animals or gods, if we lead our lives in ways that approximate theirs.

“If, as they say, human beings become gods because of an excess of excellence, clearly the disposition opposed to brutishness will be one of this sort; for just as animals cannot possess badness, or excellence, so neither can a god, his state being something more to be honored than excellence, while that of an animal is different in kind from badness” (EN VII. 1 1145a24–8).

Aristotle is here distinguishing different moral states, and arguing that brutishness and godlike excellence are the extremes that mark the boundaries of human character. Neither animals nor gods can in fact have human virtue, and we can only ever resemble them in character—we cannot literally become nonhuman. The reasons Aristotle has for denying virtue to gods and to animals are revealing of his conception of the human being.

Distinguishing Human Beings from Nonhuman Animals

We have shown that in the *Ethics* Aristotle studies rationality to help his students come into contact with or bring about the “good things and the just things” and so to live better lives. By contrast, when he discusses human and animal souls in the *De Anima* and his biological works, he is aiming for theoretical understanding, especially of the distinctive ways that living things move and change and of the causes of each. When, in this context, he considers human beings, he highlights the ways various aspects of the soul cause rational activity. As discussed earlier, people share with nonhuman animals a nutritive or reproductive faculty, a range of sensitive faculties, and a faculty of imagination. And Aristotle argues that what distinguishes human beings from animals is not only humans’ rational faculty but also the two groups’ different capacities of imagination. Imagination turns out to act as a bridge between sensation and reason in human beings and as

a stand-in for reason in animals. When we consider the differences in human and animal imagination, we see better what Aristotle thinks is distinctive of human rationality.

In discussing the relation between sensation and rationality in the *Metaphysics* at 1.1 980b1, Aristotle describes certain kinds of animal, those that have not only sensation but also memory, as “more intelligent” (*phronimôtera*) than others.¹² And in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he expands on this notion of nonhuman animal intelligence, acknowledging that because the good is not the same for people and for nonhuman animals (nor for every species of animal), what it means to be intelligent will differ among species. We said earlier that *phronêsis* is one of the kinds of rational activity that constitutes the human function and that distinguishes us from the appetitive life of nonhuman animals. And so it is a surprise to learn in *EN* VI that animals, too, have some kind of *phronêsis*. Practical wisdom, Aristotle writes, varies according to the species. Insofar as nonhuman animals exhibit forethought—the capacity to anticipate the future—he considers that they have something like the practical wisdom that is characteristic of the morally accomplished person (*EN* VI. 7 1141a20–b1). The faculty of imagination in some animals allows them to remember, to anticipate, to engage in something like intentional action, and to act collectively; imagination in animals functions in many ways as a substitute for rational thought (*DA* III.3 429a5–8). But then what distinguishes these capacities in animals from similar capacities in persons? What is the function truly distinctive of the human rational capacity?

First, Aristotle asserts that human beings have an imaginative capacity beyond that of animals. He distinguishes two kinds of imagination: sensitive and calculative: “to sum up, then, and repeat what I have said, inasmuch as an animal is capable of appetite it is capable of self-movement; it is not capable of appetite without possessing imagination; and all imagination is either calculative [*logistikê*] or sensitive

12 *Aristotelis: Metaphysica*, ed. Werner Jaeger (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957), abbreviated *Met.*

[*aisthêtikê*]. In the latter all animals partake” (*DA* III.10, 433b27–30). A sensitive faculty brings with it appetite or desire, which is the impulse to pursue what is pleasant. And since an animate being with appetite also possesses imagination, animals must have an imaginative faculty, but it is limited relative to human imagination, which is both sensitive and calculative. Aristotle describes imagination in general as the faculty “in virtue of which an image arises” (*DA* III. 3 428a1). Sensitive imagination is the ability to represent what is desirable by means of mental representations of the pleasant, obtained through sensation, while calculative imagination is the capacity to represent the desirable through mental representations of what is good, obtained through deliberation. The *logistikon*, as we have said, is one part of the rational faculty, that with which we engage in practical, rather than theoretical, rationality. So the “calculative” imagination might also be called the “rational” imagination.¹³ We can infer this from a passage at *DM* 7 701a35–6, where Aristotle says that “desire, the ultimate cause of movement, forms under the influence of sensation, or of imagination and of thought” (*noêseos*). Here we see Aristotle contrasting desires that emerge from sensation with desires that stem from rational thought. The difference between sensitive imagination, shared with animals, and rational imagination, unique to human beings, will hinge on the difference between being able to represent what is desirable in the sense of what is pleasant, and being able to represent what is desirable in the sense of what is good (including morally good). The activity of representing something is the fundamental function of imagination, but one form of that representation is restricted to human beings.

Aristotle is clear that animals have no form of rationality, neither the practical (*logismos*) nor the theoretical (*noêsis*), and that sensitive imagination is a kind of substitute for rationality as a principle of

13 For an interesting discussion of the differences between human and animal imagination, see J. L. Labarrière, J. L. Labarrière, “Imagination humaine et imagination animale chez Aristote,” *Phronesis* 29, no. 1 (1984), 17–49.

movement, a substitute that serves all animals and even those people who "follow their imaginations contrary to knowledge" (*DA* III. 10 433a9–12). The soul faculties that are unique to human beings are then not only the rational capacities but also the imaginative capacity that supports rational thought, both practical and theoretical.

Although, then, some animals are capable of forethought, their ends and pursuits are based always on the perception of pleasure and pain, and not on the apprehension of what is good or noble by a rational standard. Human beings are uniquely capable of perceiving their ends as good in a wider sense, and not merely as pleasant. This is important in the individual, since a person who aims only to achieve what is pleasant will be "brutish" on Aristotle's account. And it is especially important for the collective. Aristotle recognizes that many animal species are gregarious (as opposed to solitary), and some gregarious species are also "political" in the sense that they cooperate to achieve a common end (*HA* I. 1 487b32–488a10). Political animals that are nonhuman (for example bees, wasps, and ants) collaborate in their tasks so as to achieve their ends and communicate with one another for that purpose. But Aristotle believes their communication is limited to conveying impressions of pleasure and pain, and he thinks that making sounds is adequate for that task. So he distinguishes between having "voice" (*phonê*), which allows an animal to make sounds that communicate pleasure or pain, and having language (*logos*), which allows a person to communicate concepts and reasons for action (*Pol.* I. 2 1253a10–18). Because human beings have language, they are able to tell one another not only what is pleasant and painful but also what is good or bad, just or unjust. We are unique even among political animals in our need to formulate and to communicate judgments of moral value to one another insofar as we are rational beings. This is why language is an important element in Aristotle's conception of the human being: it is required in order to communicate moral and political determinations of value.

This means that only human beings can engage in deliberation, where that involves considering different means to achieving their ends, and can choose to act on the basis of considerations of justice and virtue. Human beings are distinctive as political animals because they can consider reasons for their actions beyond pleasure and pain and can persuade one another on the basis of those reasons. If the bee might take this path or that path to the lavender, it cannot consider whether it should continue to build hives or choose some other form of dwelling, nor whether it should reorganize the roles of different bees in the hive. Human beings, by contrast, can precisely consider whether they should organize the political community as a monarchy or a democracy and whether this action or that is the virtuous act in a particular circumstance.¹⁴

Distinguishing People from Gods

As we have shown, in distinguishing human beings from animals, Aristotle emphasizes the capacity for rationality, especially for a particular kind of deliberative rationality, one that allows people to conceptualize what is morally good and bad. And although Aristotle believes that some animal species have a capacity for forethought, he distinguishes this from deliberative rationality, which he denies to animals. It goes without saying, on his view, that animals do not have the other form of rationality that human beings enjoy—*nous*, the capacity for knowledge of unchanging objects, the activity of which is *theôria* (contemplation or reflection). So in distinguishing our species from animals, Aristotle can point to the two forms of rationality as distinctive of human beings, while allowing that some animals have certain capacities for forethought.

14 For more on Aristotle's distinction between humans and nonhuman animals, as well as their reception and development in Islamic thought, see also Luis Xavier López-Farjeat, chapter 4 here.

But the gods, he says, are rational beings, and in particular are capable of theoretical rationality in the sense of reflection.¹⁵ To account for the resemblance of human beings to the gods with respect to a capacity for contemplation, and yet to insist on the distinctiveness of the human being, Aristotle is compelled to say something about the differences between the rational activities of human beings and those of immortal divine beings whose activities are vastly superior to ours.

THE GODS DO NOT HAVE *PHRONËSIS*

Divine beings do not live in our contingent world, and their lives and activities are different from ours. In distinguishing people from the gods, Aristotle argues that the gods cannot have the moral virtues. It is not that the gods are not good, but that they do not have the sorts of lives in which moral virtues are necessary: they do not have appetites or money, they do not make contracts or confront frightening things; in general "practical doings" are unworthy of gods.

Our belief is that the gods are blessed and happy to the highest degree, but what sorts of practical doings ought we to assign to them? . . . Everything about practical doings, if one looks through all the kinds, will obviously turn out to be petty and unworthy of gods. And yet everyone supposes them to be alive, and if alive, then in activity; for they surely do not think of them as sleeping like Endymion. If, then, living has practical doing taken away from it, and (still more) producing, what is left except reflection? So then the activity of a god, superior as it is to blessedness, will be one of reflection; and so too the human activity that has the

¹⁵ We have noted that Aristotle is aware that some people refer to human beings of extraordinary virtue as "godlike," and in that context he may have in mind the conventional gods of ancient Athens. In general, he refers to a number of different things as "divine"—the traditional gods, but also celestial bodies (planets, stars, and the celestial spheres to which they are affixed). But when he attributes rational activity to the divine, he is thinking especially of the "first unmoved mover," a formal entity that is eternal and unchanging, causing other things to move without moving itself.

greatest affinity to this one will be most productive of happiness. Another indication of this is that the other animals do not share in happiness, being completely deprived of this sort of activity. For the life of gods is blessedly happy throughout, while that of human beings is so to the extent that there belongs to it some kind of semblance of this sort of activity; but of the other animals none is happy, since there is no respect in which they share in reflection. (*EN* X.8, 1178b8–30)

What Aristotle calls “practical doings” are the actions we decide on with deliberative rationality. They are the contingent objects of moral and political life: how much money to give away, whether justice requires us to return a sheep to a neighbor, how to educate the young, whether to go to war. Since the gods do not have bodies, money, or appetites, they do not engage in these activities and so do not have to practice the moral virtues; as a result, they do not need to have *phronêsis*, the virtue of the deliberative part of the soul. The excellences of character (or moral virtues), which are the excellences related to our desires, and *phronêsis*, Aristotle says, are peculiarly human because they “have to do with the compound.” That is, they are virtues in the souls of beings who are embodied and who, as a result of being embodied, have affects—emotions and desires—that must be subjected to deliberative rationality (*EN* X.8, 1178a19–22). We have seen that nonhuman animals do not have either excellences of character or practical wisdom, because they do not have deliberative rationality or a calculative imagination. But neither do the gods have *phronêsis*, because they have neither needs nor passions, as we do. Since the function of *phronêsis* is to govern our desires, to mold them into conformity with our reasoned judgment, in rational beings without bodies, appetites, or material possessions, the practical capacity of rationality is not needed. Since human beings are the only living beings that are both embodied and endowed with deliberative rationality, then, *phronêsis* is a peculiarly human virtue.

THE GODS DO, HOWEVER, HAVE *NOUS*

As we see, however, in the passage at *EN* X.8, 1178b8–30, cited earlier, the gods are alive, and therefore they must be engaged in some activity. Aristotle identifies that activity as *theôria*, reflection or contemplation, the apprehension of unchanging objects of knowledge. This rational activity is perfectly suited to divine beings, since, while appetites, money, and other features of human life are necessary both for moral virtues and for *phronêsis*, they are positive impediments for the virtue of *nous*, the contemplative virtue. Indeed, not only do the gods engage in contemplation, the gods might *be nous*: “if, then, god is always in that good state [contemplation] in which we sometimes are, this compels our wonder; and if in a better state this compels it yet more. And god is in a better state. And life also belongs to god; for the actuality of thought [*nous*] is life, and god is that actuality; and god’s essential actuality is life most good and eternal. We say therefore that god is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to god; for this is god” (*Met.* Λ.7, 1072b26–31).¹⁶ It is because we share with the gods some capacity for *nous* that Aristotle thinks that we have some resemblance to the divine. Engaging in contemplation is, as discussed earlier, the best activity for us, and a life of contemplation is the happiest life, because it is the nearest thing to a divine life that is available to us: “if happiness is in accordance with excellence, it is reasonable that it should be activity in accordance with the highest kind; and this will be the excellence of what is best. . . . That it is reflective activity has been said . . . since intelligence [*nous*] too is highest of the things in us, and the objects of intelligence are the highest knowables; further it is most continuous, since we can engage in reflection continuously more than we can in getting things done” (*EN* X. 7 1177a12–22). A life devoted to contemplation is happiest because the activity of whatever is best in us will constitute happiness.

¹⁶ Trans. Tredennick.

The capacity for contemplation is best because it is shared by the gods, and because it is an activity in principle unlimited in time, and so resembling what is eternal. Aristotle argues, by contrast, that a life focused on excellence in practical activities, a life characterized by moral virtues and *phronêsis*, is second in happiness to a life of contemplation precisely because it is human (*EN* 10. 8 1178a9–12). It turns out, then, that the best human life is one that is not entirely restricted to human activity. At the same time, human contemplation can only resemble divine contemplation; *nous* as practiced (or instantiated) by the gods is uncompromised by any material existence and by the goods peculiar to embodied existence. So while human beings engage in theoretical reasoning, and emulate and approximate the gods insofar as they are able to devote themselves to this activity, it is not the activity that is most characteristic of humans, although it is the best activity that we are able to engage in. Rather, again, it is deliberation, choice, the exercise of practical rationality, and the cultivation of the virtue of practical wisdom that are especially distinctive of human beings, since they are available neither to animals nor to gods.

We have been attending exclusively to the distinctive capacities of the human soul rather than the human body. And this is true to Aristotle, since on his account the body is merely a tool (*organon*) for realizing goals inherent in the soul. But Aristotle does not fail to consider the human body and its connection to the rational activities of the soul. In the *Parts of Animals*, Aristotle notes that nonhuman animals, especially quadrupeds, typically have large, heavy heads and torsos by comparison to their hindquarters. Humans, by contrast, have comparatively large buttocks, thighs, and calves and small torsos and heads. This means that our upper parts (including the heart—the seat of intelligence, perception, and imagination) are less burdened and we may therefore hold ourselves upright: “of all animals the human being alone stands erect, in accordance with its godlike nature and essence. For it is the function of the godlike to think and to be wise; and no easy task were this under the burden of a heavy body, pressing down from

above and obstructing by its weight the motions of the intellect and of the general sense.”¹⁷ Our upright posture frees our hands to use tools to engage in production and action. “The hand,” Aristotle writes, “is not to be looked on as one organ but as many; for it is, as it were, an instrument for further instruments” (*PA* IV.10, 687a20–22).¹⁸

We have shown, then, that the human species is defined by rational activities: contemplating divine things, recognizing opportunities for noble action, and taking charge of *aloga*, reason-receptive soul-parts, in oneself and in others. These rational activities explain the distinctive capacities of our souls and the orientation of our bodies, and they underlie both our similarities to and differences from nonhuman animals and the gods. Indeed they provide human life with its goal and therefore its meaning. But there is a complication: even though the species is defined by rational activities, remarkably few human individuals realize them fully.

MANY HUMAN BEINGS DO NOT ACHIEVE THE POTENTIAL THEY ARE BORN WITH

We may begin to see this by considering *theôria*, which is especially hard to come by. However philosophically disposed you may be, you will not progress very far without extensive training and habituation, which is needed not only to prepare your mind for philosophy but also to keep the appetites from getting in the way of your studies. Failing extraordinary luck or divine intervention, Aristotle believes that such an education is only possible with the support of the laws and customs of an extraordinary political community. Most political communities instead value wealth, pleasure, or war to the exclusion of everything

¹⁷ *PA* IV.10, 686a27–31.

¹⁸ For discussion of Aristotle's discussion of the upright human body alongside related texts by Xenophon and Plato, see Pavel Gregoric, “Plato's and Aristotle's Explanation of Human Posture,” *Rhizai: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science* 2 (2005): 183–96.

else, including a robust education in virtue and philosophy (*EN* X.9, 1179b20–1180b29).

These considerations alone ensure that few people will ever exercise *theôria*. But even *within* an ideal political milieu, philosophers need a population of farmers to grow their food, soldiers to repel hostile foreigners, and assorted politicians, priests, builders, and workers, each responsible for some crucial precondition for the existence of philosophical life (*Pol.* VII.8). Aristotle takes it for granted that the mental and physical demands of their tasks are such that none of these people can themselves have the leisure to do philosophy.

Although militaristic cities like Sparta and Crete provide poor soil for the very highest kind of rational activity, Aristotle thinks that they do better at fostering courage, moderation, and other virtues of character (which, as we have seen, exhibit and partly constitute *phronêsis*). In fact, many deeply flawed cities nevertheless find room for virtuous soldiers, politicians, and priests. But however that may be, Aristotle takes ethical virtue to be extremely demanding (if not quite as demanding as intellectual virtue) and itself to require unusually good political institutions and educational practices. Furthermore, he thinks that every human association (*koinônia*) must contain some person or collective that rules, and some other person or group subject to that rule (*Pol.* I.5, 1254a29). To be sure, it is possible to take turns ruling and being ruled, as in the “city of our prayers” of *Politics* VII and VIII where young men submit to rule as soldiers, become political rulers some years later, and then retreat to religious service in their old age (*Pol.* VII.9, 1328b40–29a18). But even in these equitable circumstances at any moment some people rule and many others are ruled (*Pol.* I.5, 1254a29).¹⁹

The division of any community into ruling and ruled parts has a dramatic implication. *Phronêsis*, unlike the other virtues, is the exclusive

19 Less ideally by Aristotle's lights, political offices in democracies are sometimes assigned by lot and held for limited terms, so that power over the city changes hands frequently.

domain of rulers (*Pol.* III.4 1277a, 14–15). And therefore insofar as people come together into communities, some submit the reason-receptive parts of their souls, their *aloga*, to the decisions of others. Even in good communities, then, while most citizens will have some share of *phronêsis* (i.e. of rationality) in the rule they exercise over wives, children, and slaves, they must most of the time remain at a significant remove from the rational activities that shape many central aspects of their lives. These rational activities are, as it were, outsourced to those ruling the political community. This is true, for example, of the farmers in some democracies, who Aristotle writes “have enough to live on as long as they work, but are unable to be at leisure, so they put the law in charge and gather only for necessary assemblies” (*Pol.* IV.6, 1292b27).²⁰

We may say in summary, then, that many human beings at any given moment cannot, in Aristotle's view, have the opportunity to realize fully their potential for rationality. Moreover, every city also contains a large number of further people with an (as yet) unrealized potential for rationality: the children who will, if all goes well, grow up to be citizens. They are of course human beings, but like most citizens of bad cities and many citizens in good ones, they count as rational only in a special or qualified sense. It is not just that their nascent or undeveloped rational capacities are immature but also that they must depend on the rationality of others, notably their parents and tutors.

Aristotle describes the transition of children into moral maturity by analogy with the writing lessons that bring a student into literacy. At first, a tutor might guide the student's hand as he (Aristotle certainly imagines that the student is a boy) writes the letter φ. In an important sense, the child is writing correctly—but then again, since he writes according to a program set by someone else, he is not literate in the

20 While farmers certainly have *technical* knowledge, and while they display a limited kind of *phronêsis* in ruling over their wives and slaves, as far as the *polis* is concerned they participate as *people-who-are-ruled*, not *rulers*. This means that they must take their purpose from the decisions of others—the rich citizens who participate in politics. And *phronêsis* is strictly the domain of the latter (*Pol.* III.4, 1277b28).

same sense as the tutor. *That* would require that he write as the literate person (*grammatikôs*) does: according to literacy in himself (*kata tèn en hautô grammatikên*) (*EN* II.4, 1105a 23–24). We remarked earlier that Aristotle thinks that a child may “have” his father’s *logistikon*, and this passage evidently illustrates what Aristotle has in mind. Moreover, it shows that every human must, at an early stage, be rational only in the sense of receiving rationality from someone else. It is only later—and only if they are lucky in the various ways we have seen—that human individuals come to act rationally on their own.

BORN WITHOUT RATIONALITY

We have been considering a number of people who fail, in one way or another, to realize the human potential for rational activity. But nothing distinguishes them *at birth* from the infants who grow up to be philosophers and moral exemplars. There are, however, some human individuals who Aristotle thinks are *congenitally* and *forever* unable to perform the paradigmatic rational activities. The clearest and best known cases are the people Aristotle discusses (as though they were exclusive categories) under the two headings “women” and “natural slaves.” Both groups, he says, are suited by nature to obedience (*Pol.* I.5, 1254b14–16 and 1254b21–26).²¹

This does not mean that they suffer from what we would today think of as cognitive or mental disabilities. Natural slaves and women may be adept at medicine, mathematics, and other skills that require sharp memory, abstract thought, and anticipating the effects of what they do. The peculiar feature of the individuals in these categories seems to be that when it comes to grasping the moral good, their souls can

21 In *Pol.* VII.7, Aristotle discusses two groups of people who are harder to classify. Europeans and other people from cold climates are, he says, “filled with spirit, but relatively lacking in thought and art,” while Asians, due to their warm climates, *have* thought and art but lack *spirit* (1327b23–28). It is unclear whether he thinks that these characteristics are fixed at birth or if he thinks that a European-born baby would, if raised in Greece, grow up to be capable of politics.

only receive the rational decisions of their husbands and masters, and never produce such decisions themselves. To this extent, Aristotle evidently holds that women and slaves are permanent analogues of the writing student. Their actions are rational (just as the student's letters are "grammatical"), but only because they receive rational decisions from the soul of someone with full-fledged *phronêsis*. And so however complex and intelligent their actions, when it comes to grasping the good with their souls, they are only rational to the extent that someone else is their ruler. The head of a household grasps the fine (*kalon*) and transmits it to the *alogon* of his wife and of his slaves, as he does to his sons. Thus the noble or the beautiful provides an end for their psychic activities as it does to his, if at a second remove.

It is illuminating to compare this hierarchical treatment of human variation with one of its successors in western philosophy (perhaps best exemplified by such thinkers as J. S. Mill and John Locke). The sort of account we have in mind follows Aristotle in thinking that humans are defined by rationality and in thinking, further, that the paradigm of rationality resembles the philosopher himself—an adult male with a certain type of education, ancestry, and so on. On such accounts, everyone who departs from the paradigm is placed on a kind of spectrum according to how much less rational he or she is than the ideal, and the various sorts of inferior human being tend to blur together: European women and the indigenous peoples of the Americas may all, for example, be treated as childlike.²²

Aristotle differs from such accounts in his determination to recognize and theorize the differences *among* the many people who fail to meet the paradigm of rationality. In his view there are many ways of failing to realize the ideal of rationality, each different from the others in kind. "The female is distinguished from the slave," Aristotle writes,

22. For an account of Locke and Mill along these lines, see Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

“for nature makes nothing in an economizing spirit, as smiths make the Delphic knife but one thing with a view to one thing; and each instrument would perform most finely if it served one task rather than many” (*Pol.* I.2, 1252b2–5). This view, like much of Aristotle’s philosophy, reflects his belief that the world contains a great deal of irreducible plurality and difference, and he holds that it has important moral consequences. It means that the appropriate treatment of women, slaves, and children will demand something different from free adult men in their roles as husbands, masters, and fathers and that different expectations of rationality are to be placed on the different kinds of imperfect person.

Aristotle, however, is maddeningly brief about just what the differences among natural subjects amount to. The canonical statement of the differences between natural subjects appears in *Politics* I.13.

It is evident, then, that both [rulers and subjects] must of necessity partake in virtue, but that there are differences in their virtue, as there are in the virtue of those who are by nature ruled. . . . For the free person rules the slave, the male the female, and the man [*anēr*] the child in different ways. The parts of the soul are present in all but they are present in a different way. The slave is wholly lacking the deliberative element; the female has it but it lacks authority; the child has it but it is incomplete. It is to be supposed that the same necessarily holds concerning the virtues of character; all must share in them, but not in the same way, but to each in relation to his own function. (*Pol.* I.13, 1260a4–20)

Modern readers find it very tempting to look for biological causes of the differences between (free Greek) men and women and natural slaves. And there is one passage in the *History of Animals* that some scholars have thought suggests that the difference in deliberative capacity is somehow caused by biological features of female animals

(*HA* IX. 1 608b8–16). But there is scant evidence to make the causal connection clear.²³

A better way to make sense of Aristotle's views on the differences between free men, women, and slaves is, in proper Aristotelian fashion, teleological: we look at the roles and jobs of each member of a well-functioning household and especially at the kinds of cooperation or rule necessary to incorporate those tasks into the collective actions of the household as a whole. The master of natural slaves simply uses them to advance his own interests (like a writing teacher who used the student's hand to complete his own personal correspondence). A husband, by contrast, directs his wife's action with an eye to her good and responds to her input. Even though females and slaves (and, for a time, male children) cannot independently engage with the good, it can nevertheless act as their end when it is communicated to their *alagon* by a ruler. One important consequence of this view is that human actions are not, in Aristotle's view, only or even primarily done by human individuals. Rather they are, as it were, spread out through and between communities, by means of speech.

²³ For a good attempt, see Mariska Leunissen, *From Natural Character to Moral Virtue in Aristotle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

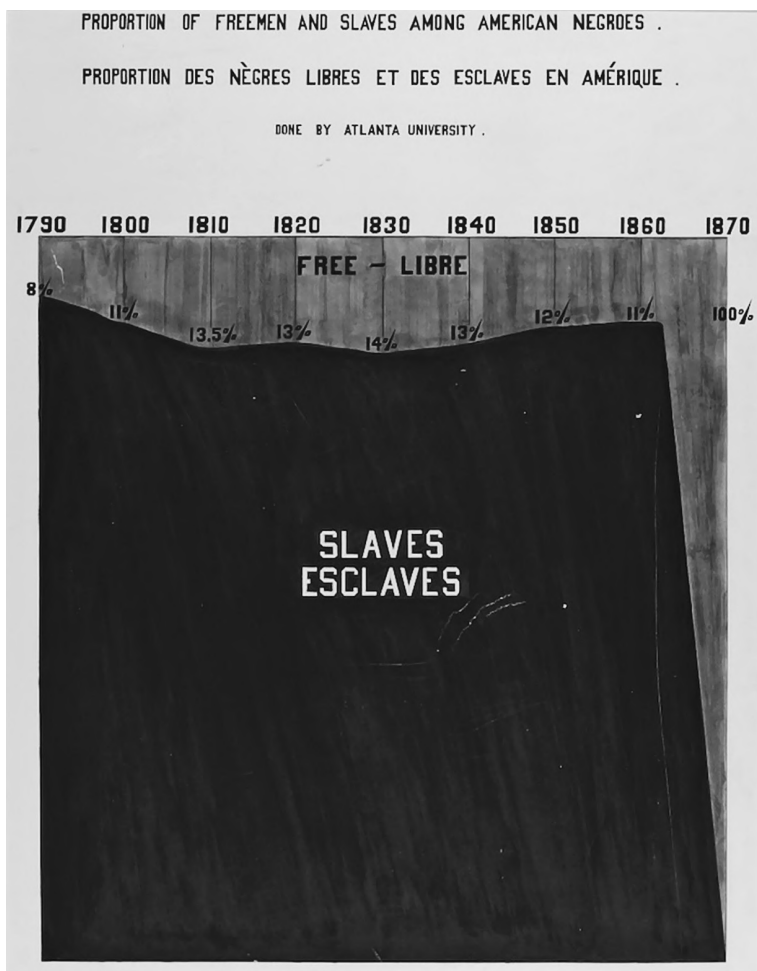


FIGURE 3 W.E.B. Du Bois, “Proportion of Freeman and Slaves among American Negroes,” a hand-drawn infographic for “The Exhibit of the American Negroes” at the Paris Exposition (1900)

Reflection

RACE AND THE HUMAN

Charles W. Mills



In C. S. Lewis's 1952 *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the first published book of his classic seven-volume series *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Mr. Beaver issues the following warning: "in general, take my advice, when you meet anything that's going to be human and isn't yet, or used to be human once and isn't now, or ought to be human and isn't, you keep your eyes on it and feel for your hatchet."¹ As with most of its audience, I first read this book as a child, and I still remember being moved at the time by the somewhat scary, shivery *rightness* of this passage. Consider how compactly it combines, from a philosophical point of view, the aesthetic (our perception), the epistemological (criteria for adjudicating our perceptions), the ontological (what an entity actually is, as against what it appears to be), and the ethical (its true moral status and the appropriate corresponding prescriptions for us: keep that hatchet ready). Yet, on this planet, there are no nonhuman creatures that fit into any of these three categories. What then accounted, and perhaps still accounts, for its mysterious affective and cognitive resonance?

1 C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), ch. 8.

The answer, I suggest, is its evocation of an unconscious racialized logic and common sense, one that has deeply shaped the Western world in modernity, and—as an increasing number of scholars are claiming—perhaps premodernity also. For if no nonhuman creatures meet the criteria for Lewis’s (white) three-way taxonomy, innumerable racialized (nonwhite) human creatures have historically been deemed to do so. In that respect, race has functioned as a marker differentiating the human humans from the seeming humans who are really, in one way or another, inhuman—if not literally then at least in a weaker sense nonetheless undermining any presumption of their unqualified equality. In this essay I will look briefly but I hope usefully at some of the many ways that race as a category, even when not formally named as such, has complicated our conceptions of the human, thereby politicizing personhood.

PERIODIZING RACE AND RACISM

First, an overview of the multiple competing periodizations of this subject matter. Humans have, of course, always demarcated themselves from other humans in myriad ways, whether by tribe, ethnicity, nation, religion, or empire. The crucial question is: when did *race* (and racism, since they have classically gone together) join this register of inclusions and exclusions? Three rival periodizations have been advanced in recent years by scholars studying the history of the West: race and racism as modern; race and racism as medieval; and race and racism as ancient.

The dominant post–World War II narrative, motivated both by the need to understand the horrors of the Third Reich’s death camps and the insurgent politics of decolonization, declared that “race” and “racism” were modern. Premodern religious anti-Judaism had become modern racial anti-Semitism with the Inquisition’s weaponizing of the *limpieza de sangre* (“purity of blood”) criterion

against Jewish conversos, while European expansionism in its various manifestations (colonialism, imperialism, racial slavery, indigenous expropriation, white settlement) had created the new world-historical “racial” categories of “whites” and “nonwhites.”² Linked to different continental origins, whites, Blacks, browns (sometimes “yellows” also), and reds had, through these processes, been “racially” constructed and arrayed in a global social hierarchy (mis)represented as natural, discursively assisted by the modern coinage in various European languages of the term “race.”

But despite its seemingly intuitive plausibility, this “short” periodization has come under increasing challenge in the last two decades, by both a “medium” and a “long” periodization. While diverging on other issues, proponents of both agree that the short periodization begs the question by presuming that color differentiation is crucial and centering biological determinism as the primary presumed locus of “racial” causation. Once these features of “race” are conceptualized as accidental rather than essential, medium and long periodization advocates insist, it will become clear that beliefs about hierarchical intrahuman variation deserving the characterization “racist” can indeed be found in premodernity, predicated on a variety of causes, and not requiring the formal coinage of “race.” Racism can exist *avant la lettre* of “race.”

Geraldine Heng’s book, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, for example, has chapters on Jews, “Saracens” (Muslims), Africans, “Skraelings” (North American Indians), Mongols, and Gypsies.³ Heng argues that religion—the unchallengeable overarching intellectual framework of the period—“could function both socioculturally and biopolitically,”

2 See, for example, Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), and George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

3 Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

thereby giving rise to emergent racialization of these populations in both the discursive and material realms of medieval Christendom.⁴ More radically, Benjamin Isaac, a classicist, in his book, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, contends that race and racism need to be backdated all the way to the pre-Christian Greco-Roman world, with Aristotle, in Isaac's view, deserving recognition as the pioneering racist theorist of the Western tradition, given his views on "natural slaves."⁵ Color or other phenotypical differentiations are not necessary. (So premodern anti-Semitism can indeed be classified as "racism," if Jews in the period in question have been racialized.) Instead, what should be taken as definitive are "collective traits, physical, mental, and moral, which are constant and unalterable by human will," resulting not just from hereditary but environmental causes as well, whose overall outcome—in a kind of Lamarckianism of the ancient world—is an ineluctable hierarchy of superiors and inferiors.⁶ The implication is that in the West, and perhaps elsewhere, the impact of race may be millennia old, not limited to the past few hundred years.

RACIST CAUSAL THEORIES

However, the common denominator across all three competing periodizations, whichever is eventually vindicated by the historical evidence, is the putting into question of the full humanity of the stigmatized racial group(s). (As will already be obvious, I am going to assume throughout a cognitivist doxastic account of racism [racism as a belief-system, an ideology] rather than a nondoxastic volitional account [racism as ill will, whether outright hatred or

4 Heng, *Invention of Race*, 3.

5 Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004). See also Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler, eds., *The Origins of Racism in the West* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

6 Isaac, *Invention of Racism*, 23.

simple indifference]. Such feelings may accompany racism but are not, in my view, essential to it.).⁷ Race, whether formally designated as such or not, generally comes to signify the fully human and the subhuman, whether genuinely within the human community or outside it (the subhuman as actually not human at all), ultimately culminating, of course, in the *Übermenschen* and *Untermenschen* of Nazism.

George Fredrickson, a proponent of the short periodization, points out that racism in western modernity is particularly conspicuous because it develops “in a context that presumed human equality of some kind,” so that those excluded “can be denied the prospect of equal status only if they allegedly possess some extraordinary deficiency that makes them less than fully human.”⁸ But even if the contrast is sharpest in this time period, given the multiple hierarchies of premodernity, long and medium periodization proponents would still maintain that race makes a difference in these epochs also. Three macro families of racist theory can be analytically demarcated, though hybrid versions will be frequent, especially in premodernity: theological/supernatural racism, biologically determinist/physiological racism (sometimes termed “scientific” racism, pre- and post-Darwinian), and cultural racism. The imputed racial inferiority in question, usually in some combination of cognitive and characterological deficiency, can thus have multiple possible causes but is generally integral to particular sociopolitical projects of domination and subordination.

Consider, to begin with, supernatural racism. Here the apparent humans (leaving this question unbegged) have been fashioned by

7 Contrast Tommie Shelby, “Ideology, Racism, and Critical Social Theory,” *Philosophical Forum* 34 (2003): 153–88, with J. L. A. Garcia, “The Heart of Racism,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 27 (1996): 5–45.

8 Fredrickson, *Racism*, 11–12.

nonnatural causation, whether divine or diabolical or demonic, to be entities of a different kind, possibly humanoid rather than actually human. David Goldenberg argues that in Greco-Roman antiquity, “black was associated with death and the underworld, the realm of the dead,” consolidating an iconography that, with the advent of Christianity, would eventually lead, in the writings of Origen and other church fathers, to “the identification of the devil and demons as Ethiopians.”⁹ So it was not merely that these dark-skinned humans were radically deviant in appearance from the normative white body, but it was questionable whether they were humans at all. Similarly, Joshua Trachtenberg’s book, *The Devil and the Jews*, documents medieval anti-Semitic depictions of Jews as not merely cohorts of the Devil (given their killing of Christ) but possibly incarnations of the Devil himself.¹⁰ The Prophet Muhammad was often represented as the Anti-Christ in Middle Ages texts and, unsurprisingly, his followers as diabolically driven, while the unfamiliar religions of the indigenous populations Europeans encountered in their voyages to Africa and the Americas were often assimilated to devil-worship. Separate creation (supernatural polygenism) was sometimes posited to explain the weird appearances and ways of other peoples, who were clearly the descendants not of (the presumptively white) Adam and Eve but of some other coupling. (To return briefly to Narnia: Mr. Beaver also explains that, appearances to the contrary, “there isn’t a drop of real human blood in the [White] Witch,” who, it turns out, is not a “Daughter of Eve” but is descended from the “Jinn” on one side and the “giants” on the other.)¹¹ In all these examples, then, the race of the Other is actually literally nonhuman.

9 David Goldenberg, “Racism, Color Symbolism, and Color Prejudice,” in Eliav-Feldon et al., *Origins of Racism*, 88–108; 93, 99.

10 Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Anti-Semitism*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2002).

11 Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, ch. 8.

Biological racism, locating deficiency in the inferior flesh of the negatively racialized, is classically divided into pre- and post-Darwinian versions, because of the importance of Darwin's 1859 *Origin of Species*. Pre-Darwinian biological determinism has some ambiguous exemplars in ancient and medieval physiognomics (disputed by some scholars).¹² But in the modern period numerous clear-cut examples can be found, for example, appeals to craniometry and the supposed racial implications of Petrus Camper's facial angle to rank varieties of humans, and endless speculations on the causal mechanisms through which Negroes' blackness permeated their inner essence as well as their outer appearance. (Atlantic chattel slavery was beginning to make the exact human status of Blacks a global issue.)¹³ If in the medieval period, Blacks had been fearsome diabolical creatures, now they were natural slaves—from the inhuman to the subhuman. Secular polygenism was also important in some circles (embraced, indeed, by David Hume and Voltaire, as well as the American School of Ethnology). Blacks and Native Americans were so different from normal humanity that they had to have had separate origins. Post-Darwinian scientific racism, by contrast, was of necessity monogenist, presupposing a single origin for all races: the inferiority of the nonwhite races was now to be attributed to their location on a lower rung of the evolutionary ladder.¹⁴ Blacks in particular had been compared to apes from the beginning of modernity, and it was now claimed that this consanguinity was no speculation but was scientifically proven. For about a century and a half a natural hierarchy of the races was taken to be an established fact, shaping not just popular and highbrow Western culture but

12 Joseph Ziegler, "Physiognomy, Science, and Proto-racism 1200–1500," in Eliav-Feldon et al., *Origins of Racism*, 181–99.

13 Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

14 Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, rev. and exp. ed. (New York: Norton, 1996).

the workings of the academy also. Only after World War II would systematic repudiation of these assumptions begin.

Finally, short periodization theorists usually identify cultural racism—deficiency inhering neither in supernatural nor in naturalistic causation but in problematic cultures—as a new development motivated by the postwar revulsion from Nazism and scientific racism. (Long and medium periodization proponents, by contrast, see scientific racism as the outlier in the history of racism and would claim that racist ideologues are actually simply returning to the premodern norm.) If one vocabulary had now become taboo, a euphemized and displaced substitute language could still accomplish much of the political work of its predecessor. No one (it would be loudly asserted) is claiming that, say, inner-city Black and brown residents of the urban jungle or immigrant Muslim populations in the *banlieues* are members of inferior *races*. But they do have (it is alleged) dysfunctional or inassimilable cultures that make attempted remedial government intervention in the ghetto pointless and the immigration of such groups undesirable. Thus, with a depressing consistency, we witness again and again the enduring pattern by which race renders some humans (assuming they actually are humans) less than equal humans.



FIGURE 4 Kawanabe Kyōsai, *Night Parade of One Hundred Demons* (1892)

CHAPTER 3

The Status of the Human in Classical Chinese Philosophy

Franklin Perkins

Chinese philosophy was born during the long and painful decline of the Zhou dynasty, characterized by centuries of constant wars between competing states. The brutality and chaos of what are known as the Spring and Autumn (771–476 BCE) and Warring States (475–221 BCE) periods caused a breakdown of traditional forms of authority, an increase in regional diversity, and the loss of any unified control over ideology. At the same time, states competed to attract thinkers who could advise on any aspect of successful governance. These factors led to a proliferation of philosophical views sometimes referred to as the “hundred schools” (*baijia* 百家). One of the central points of contention was around the status and nature of human beings. Generalizing about these debates in this period is no easier or less misleading than it would be for the philosophies of the classical Mediterranean

world.¹ In this essay, I will focus only on the contrast between Mengzi 孟子, a Ru or Confucian, and Zhuangzi 莊子, a Daoist.² Both lived in the late fourth and early third centuries BCE. Both are known through the texts that bear their names.³ Before considering their specific views, it is necessary to set the context in which the status of the human became a problem.

ANTHROPOMORPHISM AND ITS DECLINE

The most direct background for understanding the views of Mengzi and Zhuangzi is the idea of the divine that was introduced when the Zhou dynasty replaced the Shang or Yin dynasty, in the eleventh century BCE. The ultimate divine power was labeled *tian* 天, conventionally translated as “heaven.” *Tian* was immanent in the world and closely identified with the patterns of nature. The same term referred to the sky, and the word for the world or the realm was *tianxia* 天下, “what is under the heavens.” At the same time, *tian* had anthropomorphic characteristics, including consciousness, ideas, desires, and values. *Tian* enforced an ethical order based on concern for the well-being of the people. Those who helped the people would attain *tianming* 天命,

1 For a more detailed discussion of many of these same themes over a wider range of philosophers, see Franklin Perkins, *Heaven and Earth Are Not Humane: The Problem of Evil in Early Chinese Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).

2 “Confucianism” and “Daoism” should not be seen as self-conscious schools or movements but rather as retrospective ways of making sense of the diversity of thought in the classical period. Their usefulness and limitations are comparable to those of “rationalism” and “empiricism” in understanding early modern European philosophy.

3 I use the names “Mengzi” and “Zhuangzi” for convenience in discussing the views expressed in those two texts. They were compiled centuries later in the Han dynasty, and there is no way to know how accurately they reflect the views of the original philosophers themselves. The *Zhuangzi* clearly contains multiple positions and philosophies; I here focus on the first seven chapters, known as the “Inner Chapters.” All translations from the Chinese are my own, based on Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1978), for the *Zhuangzi* (cited by chapter/page number), and Jiao Xun 焦循, *Mengzi zhengyi* 孟子正義 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1987) for the *Mengzi* (cited by passage number). For English translations of the texts see Bryan Van Norden, *Mengzi, with Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2008), and Brook Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings, with Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009).

the “mandate of heaven,” and gain political power; those who harmed and exploited the people would lose the mandate and be overthrown. One influential early philosophical movement, founded by Mozi 墨子 (fifth century BCE), expanded upon this doctrine to claim that the intention of heaven (*tianzhi* 天志) is for the benefit of all people, so that those who impartially care (*jian'ai* 兼愛) for others will be rewarded and those who do not will be punished. While there were no attempts to ground human cognition in the mind of heaven, this belief in heaven’s mandate provided human ethics with an ontological basis in nature itself. One of the most common narratives of early Chinese intellectual history is the claim that this view of heaven gave rise to Chinese humanism, a term chosen by modern Chinese intellectuals to emphasize the similarities between this cultural shift in China and the birth of modernity in Europe.⁴

The grounding of human values in a human-like and human-centered divine power did not last long in China. The suffering and lack of decent political alternatives as the Zhou dynasty collapsed made it difficult to believe that heaven cared for the people. The identification of *tian* with the patterns of nature made it impossible to deny that *tian* existed. Instead, some took heaven as unpredictable and ultimately impermeable to human understanding. In that case, the mandate, *ming* 命, came to mean something closer to blind fate. Others identified heaven with the regular order of nature, which is predictable but shows no particular regard for human beings. In this process, *tian* gradually lost its anthropomorphic qualities, and in the late Warring States period, *tian* can often be adequately translated as “nature.” A more radical approach was to displace the centrality of heaven by making it derivative of something more primordial. Explicit discussions of cosmogony

4 For examples, see Wing-tsit Chan, *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963); Chen Lai 陳來, *Tradition and Modernity: A Humanist View*, tr. E. Ryden (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Peng Guoxiang 彭國翔, *Rujia chuantong: Zongjiao yu renwen zhuyi zhijian* 儒家傳統：宗教與人文主義之間 (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2007); and Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, *Zhongguo renxinglun shi* 中國人性論史 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1969).

arose by the mid-fourth century BCE. While differing in their details, these cosmogonies argued that the differentiated world we experience arose spontaneously or of itself (*ziran* 自然, literally, self-so) from a state of undifferentiation. Ultimately, this originary state came to be known primarily as *dao* 道 (guide, way, path) and as *wu* 無 (to lack or be absent, as a noun meaning a state of no things). This ultimate ontological source was stripped of all traces of anthropomorphism—*dao* has no intentions, no concepts, no values, no judgments, no form. The new concern with cosmogony was explicitly tied to an attack on anthropocentrism, presenting human beings as part of a system that is no more human than it is rabbit, oak, or water. A new term for the world rose to prominence, *wanwu* 萬物, literally the tens of thousands (*wan*) of things (*wu*). As the *Zhuangzi* says, “in stating the number of things we say ‘ten thousand.’ Human beings are just one of them” (Guo, *Zhuangzi jishi*: 17/564). This basic form of cosmogony first emerged in close connection to what we now call Daoism, but it became the dominant model across Chinese philosophy. With these shifts, the status of human beings could no longer be justified by appeal to anthropomorphic qualities of the divine.

MENGZI AND NATURAL HUMAN DISPOSITIONS

The Confucian response to this crisis centered on giving an account of natural human dispositions and affects. For Mengzi, what is most distinctive of human beings is neither reason nor free will but certain kinds of socially oriented feelings. One who lacks these feeling is not human:

This is why I say all people have a heart of not bearing [harm to] other people: Now if someone suddenly sees a small child about to enter a well, any human being will have a heart of alarm and compassion, not to get in with the child's father and mother, not to seek a reputation among neighbors and friends, and not because of the

sound of it. Looking at it in this way, lacking a heart of compassion and pain is not human; lacking a heart of shame and aversion is not human; lacking a heart of declining and yielding is not human; lacking a heart of affirming and negating is not human. The heart of compassion and pain is the sprout of benevolence. The heart of shame and aversion is the sprout of rightness. The heart of declining and yielding is the sprout of ritual propriety. The heart of affirming and negating is the sprout of wisdom. People have these four sprouts like they have four limbs. To have these four sprouts and say that you cannot do it is to rob yourself. To say that one's sovereign cannot do it is to rob one's sovereign. All have these four sprouts within themselves. Know how to broaden and fulfill them and they will be like a fire beginning to ignite or a spring beginning to flow out. If one can fulfill them, they suffice to stabilize all within the four seas. If one cannot fulfill them, they do not suffice to serve even one's father and mother. (2A6)

Natural dispositions are analyzed in terms of *xing* 性, which is often translated as human “nature” but refers only to natural and spontaneous affective responses to events in the world. Mengzi focuses his account of human *xing* on the dispositions of the heart (*xin* 心). In China, the heart was seen as the locus of both emotion and cognition, and the term is often translated as “heart-mind.”

The ontology underlying this conception of human dispositions is implicit in the *Mengzi*, but we can fill it in with a recently discovered bamboo text that was buried around 300 BCE, known as “Dispositions Come from What Is Allotted” (*Xing zi ming chu* 性自命出).⁵ In this text, the dispositions exist as a configuration of dynamic force or vital energy, *qi* 氣. Affects arise when events in the world around us

5 For both the Chinese text and a translation, see Scott Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian*, Cornell East Asia Series, 2 vols. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012). Passages are cited by slip number.

stimulate this force into motion (Cook, *Bamboo Texts*, slips 1–7). For Mengzi, all human beings have a disposition to feel compassion and concern, but the feelings themselves arise only when stimulated by something in the world. In the foregoing passage, he gives the example of seeing a child in danger. Elsewhere he describes a king who feels pity when he sees a panicked ox being led to slaughter and people who feel horror upon seeing the exposed corpse of a parent eaten by scavengers. In these examples, an event in the world stimulates an immediate affective response that precedes deliberation and rationalization. This model has some resemblance to a distinction between potentiality and actuality, but the ontology is different. Nothing is actualized. Rather, an actual force is released and channeled in a particular direction.

Mengzi explicates human dispositions along four lines. In each case, there is the disposition, the affects that arise from it, and the virtue those affects lead to. The affects are described as the *sprouts* (*duan* 端) of the virtues. We are not by nature virtuous, but we naturally have feelings that tend to grow in the direction of the virtues. That growth requires nourishment and protection. The first of these four sprouts is a feeling of concern or compassion most often associated with an inability to bear the suffering of others or the spontaneous bonds of care that emerge within a family. The second is a feeling of shame and aversion or disgust, both of which grow into rightness, *yi* 義. A famous line from the “Great Learning” (*Daxue* 大學) chapter of the *Li ji* (*Record of Rituals*) says that one should be averse to bad actions as one is averse to a bad smell (Zhu 2003: 7). Mengzi may have been less certain about the third sprout, which leads toward ritual. In one passage, the feelings are given as a tendency to yield and defer (2A6), but in a parallel passage, they are respect and reverence (*jinggong* 恭敬) (6A6). In other parts of the text, ritual appears not as coming from a specific emotion but rather from the need to express any strong emotions in an embodied way. That is the view expressed in “Dispositions.” The fourth of the sprouts is a tendency to judge and categorize, literally to affirm (*shi* 是) and negate (*fei* 非) or to label as right and wrong. That leads to wisdom

and thus is cognitive in some sense, but Mengzi emphasizes its affective dimension. In one sense, human beings spontaneously respond to events with labels and judgments in just the same way they respond to them with feelings of concern or aversion. In another sense, to affirm something is to take an affirmative stance toward it, to support, promote, or rely on it.

Mengzi is best known for his claim that natural human dispositions (*xing*) are good, but the feelings he describes fall far short of the virtues themselves (just as a sprout has a long way to go before being a tree). Moreover, the foregoing passage refers only to the dispositions of the heart-mind. The other organs—the eyes, ears, nose, and mouth—also respond spontaneously and naturally to stimuli, producing desires for sensory pleasure. Strictly speaking, these desires are also part of human *xing* (7B24). These are not intrinsically bad, but they compete with the concerns of the heart, so they must be put in a subordinate position. Mengzi discusses this in terms of the greater parts of the body (the heart) and the lesser parts (the other sense organs) (6A14, 6A15). Mengzi seems to think that without cultivation, the heart will sometimes dominate and sometimes lose out. That follows if we remember that dispositions are stimulated by what we happen to experience in the moment, so that we are pushed and pulled along by whatever we happen to encounter. Even so, his claim that our dispositions are good follows from a belief that the heart has some natural priority. In one passage, he argues that all people have some things they would refuse to do, even at risk of their own lives (6A10). As an example, he gives refusing to murder a sibling in order to keep oneself alive (6B1).

DISPOSITIONS, CULTURE, AND POLITICS IN THE *MENGZI*

In saying that our dispositions are good, Mengzi is not passing moral judgment. The term he uses, *shan* 善, could just as well be translated as “excellent.” Its opposite, *e* 惡, is the same character, noted earlier, that is used in the verbal sense (pronounced *wu*) for being averse to

or repulsed by, so *e* is closer to aesthetic repulsiveness than evil. When Mengzi claims that human *xing* is good, he means that our natural feelings can be affirmed, encouraged, and used. They are inherently supportive of community, and Mengzi would agree with Aristotle's definition of human beings as social or political animals (*zôon politikon*). That contrasts with a view that would define human beings primarily in terms of self-interested desires that a community must then control and manipulate, a view taken by Xunzi, a Confucian who lived a century later. For Mengzi, any group of human beings will spontaneously form bonds of care, design systems of rules and rituals, and accumulate some wisdom.

The sense in which human beings are social runs deeper than the claim that humans naturally form communities. The four "sprouts" are modes by which culture is absorbed. However we translate the term *xing*, it cannot be understood as "nature" in contrast to "nurture." For Mengzi, human nature is to be nurtured. Having a need to express deference and respect drives human beings to learn culturally specific rituals; the tendency to feel shame causes humans to internalize society's rules; spontaneous judgments are guided by the concepts, discourses, and bodies of wisdom a culture transmits. The dispositions allow for a high degree of indeterminacy. The fact that all human beings have a tendency to feel shame and disgust does not entail that everyone will have the same reactions to the same events. What counts as shameful will depend on more or less contingent cultural factors. It is unclear the degree to which Mengzi takes the content of the virtues as being contained within the natural feelings, but in one passage he says that even the basic order of the family was originally a product of culture (3A4). Mengzi believes that our natural dispositions lead human beings to develop ritualized ways of dealing with the corpses of those we care about, but he says that the specific funeral practices he advocates took form only through a process of cultural development (2B7, 3A5). Human beings are not defined by the possession of rationality or some minimum knowledge but just

by the desire to learn. Even compassion is conditioned by cultural lines of identification, patterns of attention, conceptions of desert, and so on.

Mengzi believes that all human beings, by nature, absorb culture. Culture itself arises through the dialectical interplay of natural dispositions and environmental circumstances.

This process is explained most clearly in “Dispositions,” which says: “the odes, documents, rituals, and music: in their initial emergence they were all born from human beings. The odes were deliberately done. The documents were deliberately spoken. The rituals and music were deliberately raised up. Sagacious people compared their kinds to arrange and collect them, observed what came first and last to adjust them, embodied their appropriateness to give them moderation and cultured refinement, ordered their feelings so as to go out from and enter into them. Afterward they repeated them for teaching. Teaching is that by which virtue [*de*] is born in the center” (Cook, *Bamboo Texts*, slips 15–18). The odes and documents refer to classic literary collections, the first consisting of songs or poems and the second primarily of speeches from the past. The rituals and music could refer to texts or a canon of forms passed down by tradition. All these originated as spontaneous expressions of natural human emotions. These spontaneous forms were then deliberately systematized, moderated, and organized by particularly cultivated and wise people, those with sagacity (*sheng* 聖). Rituals and music do not just express feelings, though. They also inspire them and shape them. The forms arising from natural feeling turn back to shape those feelings, which then opens up new possibilities and demands for expression. Mengzi gives this kind of description of the evolution of funerals. Originally, a feeling of horror at seeing the exposed corpse of a parent led people to bury bodies (3A5). While that may have satisfied the original feeling, people then became uncomfortable with the thought of dirt touching the dead body, leading to the use of coffins (2B7). Ethical rules and a body of wisdom develop through the same kind of dialectical process.

In this way, culture is neither simply a product of human nature nor a construct of human artifice.

In one sense, what is distinctively human are dispositions to feel certain basic social feelings. As is common in political applications of human nature, these dispositions provide a standpoint in nature from which to criticize social and political formations. If people are bad or rebellious, that can be blamed on their leaders, because that is not their natural state. A government that relies on coercion through material rewards and punishments rather than on natural feelings like care and shame can be judged as unstable. One can argue that the government must ensure that the people have a stable material basis for their lives and access to education, because without these it is impossible for the sprouts to grow into the virtues. In another sense, though, the basic affects of the heart are just the raw materials of a human being. What makes us fully human is culture, and what makes us most human is the classical culture promoted by the Confucians. Human beings become who they are through relationships, rituals, education, and so on. These are saturated with political relations, most of all with respect for certain kinds of hierarchies. Mengzi regularly appeals to rulers by arguing that they can best secure their own power by forming their people according to the Confucian program. In spite of such claims, Mengzi's own political agenda cannot be identified with that of the rulers of the states, and the Confucian program is as much directed toward shaping the ruling class as it is toward shaping the people in general. Here we see how equating *xing* with human nature can be misleading. Appeals to human nature often obscure the role of power in defining the human. These political elements function through their invisibility, such that exposing and denaturalizing them constitutes a form of critique. In contrast, Mengzi's argument for natural human dispositions defines human beings as inherently cultural. As a result, the Confucians are quite open about the role of culture and power in creating and defining human beings.

SITUATING HEAVEN AND HUMAN IN THE *MENGZI*

Mengzi's position regarding culture and human dispositions does not require a connection to the divine. He takes his claims to be based on empirical evidence. The cultivation of the feelings that arise from the heart into the Confucian virtues is justified consequentially. It allows the most consistent and flourishing life for individuals, and it leads to a society that is harmonious and stable without violence and coercion. While differing in their views of the content of human dispositions, earlier Confucians (as in "Dispositions") and later Confucians (such as Xunzi) hold analogous positions without any appeal to divine support. Mengzi, though, is particularly concerned with linking the cultivation of our *xing* (dispositions) to *tian* (heaven). Several passages mention that dispositions come from heaven. The following passage reverses direction, focusing not on where the dispositions come from but on how human beings relate back to heaven: "those who fully express their hearts know their natural dispositions. Knowing their dispositions, they know heaven. To preserve the heart and nourish these dispositions is the way to serve heaven. To not think twice about long or short life but to cultivate one's self to await it—this is how to take a stand toward what is mandated" (7A1). The first half of the passage gives two parallel progressions linking the feelings arising from the heart to heaven. We know and nourish our dispositions through the heart, and we know and serve heaven through these dispositions.

The problem with this connection is that Mengzi has already given up the belief that what heaven does must be good and thus that the patterns of the natural world can serve as a norm. When specific events in the text are attributed to heaven, they are bad or unfair. For example, on failing to persuade the ruler of the state of Qi to adopt his policies, Mengzi leaves in frustration. He explains that heaven usually determines that peace and order alternate with chaos and suffering in five-hundred-year cycles. This view already indicates that heaven is an amoral force representing the basis for cyclical patterns in nature. In

this case, though, the suffering has gone on for seven hundred years. The cycle has been violated, for the worse. That deviation occurs because, as Mengzi says, “heaven does not yet desire peace and order in the world” (2B13). This view of heaven explains the last half of the passage on knowing and serving heaven (7A1). The fact that you serve heaven has no connection to whether or not you will succeed or be rewarded with a long life. The mandate, *ming*, is closer to blind fate than to an expression of ethical order. It is difficult to know if the traces of anthropomorphic language Mengzi uses, such as referring to what heaven desires (*yu* 欲), should be taken literally, but in any case, heaven no longer is centered on the well-being of the people or on rewarding those who are good.

Why then would it matter whether or not we *serve* heaven? In context, this passage is probably focused more on what we should not do than on what we should do. As already mentioned, our dispositions also include the natural desires of the senses for pleasure. When Mengzi says we know and nourish our dispositions through the heart, his point is that we do not do that through the other senses. Similarly, when he says we serve heaven through our natural dispositions, his point is that we should not try to serve heaven by following its patterns or attempting to determine its intentions. From this perspective, Mengzi may be stretching the meaning of “serve” (*shi* 事) toward something more like “follow along with.” That is supported by the fact that all things have natural dispositions derived from heaven. Given the actual variety among human beings, Mengzi makes his case for natural dispositions through analogies with other living things. This argument is most explicit in another passage, where Mengzi begins by claiming that plants have distinct dispositions and patterns of growth and then says that dogs have their distinctive taste in food. For that reason, we would expect human beings also to have distinctive dispositions. That applies to the kinds of food we like, but also to the heart: “thus my heart delighting in coherent patterns and rightness is like my mouth delighting in

the meat of domesticated animals" (6A7). If all things react to the world through natural dispositions that derive from heaven, then it would seem that all things serve heaven by developing their particular dispositions. In this way, Mengzi links the particularities of human life to heaven without requiring that heaven itself be in any way anthropomorphic or anthropocentric. We serve heaven through our humanness, but no more than dogs serve heaven through their dogness.

These passages point to a split between two ways of relating to heaven, one through the external patterns of nature and the other through internal dispositions. These two ways of relating can conflict. Consider the passage explaining Mengzi's frustration in leaving the state of Qi (2B13). If heaven supports cycles of order and disorder, then serving heaven would seem to require that we do the same. If heaven does not now desire peace, it would be an act of defiance to seek an end to war. Going along with heaven in these cases, though, would go against natural human feelings of care, shame, and so on. One response would be to set up the human in opposition to heaven. Instead, Mengzi emphasizes that these dispositions also come from heaven. Human beings thus face a situation that can be called tragic, torn between two relationships to heaven, one internal and one external. These contradictory demands make little sense if we think in terms of heaven's intentions, but Mengzi's account is plausible if we think of *tian* as labeling the natural. From that perspective, it is quite reasonable to say that times of injustice and war are natural and that working to keep peace and stability is natural (for us). When Mengzi says we serve heaven through our dispositions, he means that in such conflicts only the latter sense of the natural is relevant. Continuing to consider this a form of "serving" heaven may be a rhetorical device meant to link his human-based philosophy to reverence for the divine, but if we think about the natural as Mengzi would, as patterns of dynamic forces, then his point is that cultivating virtue channels and develops such forces rather than resisting and constricting them.

HUMAN DIVERSITY AND DISAGREEMENT
IN THE *ZHUANGZI*

Opposition to anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism is a central and explicit concern in the *Zhuangzi*. The divine—whether labeled *tian* or *dao* or more derisively as “the great clump of dirt”—is the empty ontological ground of a process of spontaneous arising and diversification. The way the diversity of the world emerges is compared to the arising of different sounds as the wind blows across various shapes and textures, having no purpose or agent. Rather than focus on the arising of kinds of things defined by common dispositions, Zhuangzi emphasizes diversity and the fact that each human being is but one of the emerging tens of thousands of things. His critique of anthropocentrism often involves comparison with other animals or plants. In one anecdote, a famous carpenter comes across a huge tree, but he pays it no attention. When his disciples ask him why, he explains that the tree is utterly useless: boats made from it would sink, coffins would rot, houses collapse, and so on. That night, the tree appears to him in a dream with the following defense:

What will you compare me to? Will you compare me to those refined trees? Now the hawthorn, pear, tangerine, or pomelo, those kinds that have fruits or melons, when the fruit is ripe then they are pulled off. When they are pulled off, the tree is abused. Large branches are broken and small branches are bent down. Thus, their own abilities embitter their lives. They do not finish out their heavenly years and die in the midst of the way, themselves bringing on the assaults of the worldly and vulgar. Things all are like this. Moreover, I have sought for a long time to have no use, almost dying, but now I have attained it, and this is of great use to me. Suppose I had a use, could I have attained this great size? Moreover, you and I, we are each things. How can things compare themselves to each other? As a worthless human nearing death,

what would you know about a worthless tree? (Guo, *Zhuangzi jishi*: 4/172)

In equating uselessness with what has no human use, the carpenter expresses a typically anthropocentric view. Being useful to human beings is not at all useful for a tree. We might privilege human judgment by saying that our concept of use is somehow more correct, but there is nothing in Zhuangzi's ontology to justify that exceptional status. As the tree says, as members of the tens of thousands of things, no thing has a privileged position from which to judge any other.

The broader significance of this attack on anthropocentrism appears in a long dialogue between Wang Ni and Gaptooth. The dialogue begins when Gaptooth asks Wang Ni: "Do you know what things affirm [*shi* 是] in common?" Wang Ni replies: "How would I know that?" He gives the same reply when asked if he knows that he does not know, and if any knowledge is possible at all. Wang Ni then goes into a list of preferences across different species, beginning with where to live, moving on to what to eat, and ending with erotic beauty: "monkeys take gibbons as partners, bucks exchange with does, loaches play with fish. Mao Qiang and Lady Li are what people consider beautiful, but if fish saw them they would enter the depths, if birds saw them they would fly high, and if deer saw them they would dash away. Of these four, which knows the world's correct beauty?" (Guo, *Zhuangzi jishi*: 2/93). In saying that different species have different standards, Wang Ni attacks the anthropocentric assumption that human standards reveal objective truth. There is no way to determine what "The Beautiful" would be, as we would first have to decide on which species was the judge. From this point, he draws a broader skeptical conclusion: "from where I see it, the sprouts of humaneness and rightness and the trails of affirmation and negation are all inextricably confused and chaotic. How could I know their distinctions?" (Guo, *Zhuangzi jishi*: 2/93). This move from species differences to skepticism of human judgments was recognized by Sextus Empiricus as one of the ten

modes (*Outlines of Scepticism* I.xiv).⁶ Even so, from the dialogue alone, it is not immediately clear how this skeptical conclusion is supposed to follow. After all, we can recognize that our taste in erotic beauty is no better than that of fish or deer without being thereby being tempted to fall in love with fish.

The skeptical problem arises as soon as human beings disagree among themselves. As Zhuangzi puts it in a passage that appears at the end of the chapter with the Wang Ni dialogue:

Suppose that you and I debate and you beat me, but I don't beat you—then are you right [*shi*]? am I then wrong [*fei*]? If I beat you and you don't beat me—then am I right? Are you then wrong? Are some right and some wrong? Are we together right? Are we together wrong? You and I cannot know each other. Thus other people certainly receive this darkness and confusion, and who could we have correct it? Could one who is the same as you correct us? Since he is the same as you, how can he correct us? Could one who is the same as me correct us? Since he is the same as me, how could he correct us? Could one who is different from you and me correct us? Since he differs from you and me, how could he correct us? Could one who is the same as you and me correct us? Since he is the same as you and me, how could he correct us? So then you and I and other people all are not able to know each other. Should we then wait on another? (Guo, *Zhuangzi jishi*: 2/107)

Imagine that two people disagree on the ideal of human beauty. One way to settle that disagreement would be to appeal to an objective standard independent of human taste. That possibility is closed off by Wang Ni: how would we know that the objectively most beautiful was not some particularly magnificent goldfish? The other way to decide

6 *Sextus Empiricus: Outlines of Scepticism*, ed. and tr. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 17.

the issue would be appeal to something like natural human taste, the route taken by Mengzi. That path is undermined, though, by the very fact of disagreement. If you and I are equally human, from what standpoint can a view held by one of us be privileged over one held by the other?

The problem of disagreement among human beings is analogous to the problem of disagreement among species, and the different species in the Wang Ni dialogue probably also represent differences between human beings. That kind of comparison is explicit in other parts of the *Zhuangzi*. In one passage, the attempt to persuade a ruler with the ideals of the Confucian sages is linked to a story in which a king has found an unusual bird and decided to welcome it with a concert and banquet. Treated as a human being, the bird dies. That is followed by a comparison to fish: “fish live in water; human beings die in water. Those which differ from each other have loves and hates that are different. Thus, the early sages did not take abilities as one and did not make all duties the same” (Guo, *Zhuangzi jishi*: 18/621). This passage clearly takes human differences as analogous to species differences. That is not necessarily a metaphor. There was nothing in early Chinese ontology to justify a belief that the concept of “human being” was anything more than an inductive generalization based on singular human beings. While the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi* avoid using the term *xing*, other chapters argue that each living thing has its own distinctive *xing*. On this view, the differences between two human beings is not different in kind from the differences between a human being and any particular nonhuman animal.

One theme running throughout the *Zhuangzi* is an emphasis on human diversity, which arises from differences in perspectives, customs, experiences, and natures. This focus on diversity seems to most directly attack Mengzi’s position through discussions of the body. We have already seen Mengzi’s claim that all human beings have the four affective responses of the heart in the same way that they have four limbs. In the passage that makes the comparison between human

beings and dogs, Mengzi says that if someone were asked to make a pair of shoes for an unknown person, he might not get the size right but he would know the shape, because “the similarity of shoes is from the world’s feet being the same” (6A7). In these arguments, Mengzi moves from the relatively obvious similarity of human bodies to the less obvious similarity of our hearts. In response, the *Zhuangzi* features a number of characters with missing feet and oddly shaped bodies. The point is that even on the level of the body, there are human variations. One passage, in the so-called Primitivist chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, links this point about bodies explicitly back to *xing*, natural dispositions. Some people are born with connected toes or an extra finger. In so far as that arises naturally, it is part of their *xing*. Making them “normal,” by, for example, cutting off the extra finger, would do violence to their nature.

FROM THE HUMAN TO THE HEAVENLY IN THE *ZHUANGZI*

The dialogue between Wang Ni and Gaptooth does not end with skepticism of benevolence and rightness. Still seeking some kind of norm, Gaptooth suggests a simpler consequentialist criterion—do sagacious people at least know that we should pursue benefit (li 利) and avoid harm? Wang Ni replies: “utmost people [*zhiren* 至人] are like spirits! A great swamp burning could not make them hot, the He or Han rivers freezing could not make them cold, violent lightning splitting mountains or fierce winds shaking the seas could not startle them. In this way, they ride the clouds and vital energies, mount the sun and moon, and wander outside the four seas. Life and death make no changes in them—how much less the sprouts of benefit and harm!” (Guo, *Zhuangzi jishi*: 2/96).

This passage is one of several that attribute something like magical powers to sagelike figures, but the point seems to be not that they are immune to harm but that they are beyond caring about life and death. If even death is not a concern, then any harm can be accepted. With this

statement, Wang Ni breaks from the analogy with animal tastes. That description centers on three elements most basic to the continuation of animal life—finding shelter, attaining food, and reproducing with a mate. Although what each species needs along these three lines differs, they share a common concern with life. The utmost people escape that common concern. Accepting death is a recurring theme throughout the *Zhuangzi*, where it is used as an extreme case of the ability to go along with whatever happens. That ideal—described in the title of the first chapter as “free and easy wandering” (*xiaoyaoyou* 逍遙遊)—is the main focus of the Inner Chapters. It is an ideal that resembles *ataraxia* or *apatheia* in Hellenistic philosophy, as well as freedom from desires and suffering in Buddhism.

What this means in relation to the status of the human is taken up in a dialogue between Zhuangzi and Huizi, a friend and prominent philosopher. It begins with a general statement about sagacious people and heaven: “thus, sagacious people have that in which they wander. They take knowledge as disaster, pledges as glue, virtue as making connections, and craft as commerce. Sagacious people do not scheme, so what use is knowledge? They do not carve, so what use is glue? They have no loss, so what use is virtue? They do not sell, so what use is commerce? These four are heaven’s nourishment; heaven’s nourishment is heaven’s food. Since they receive food from heaven, what use are humans!” (Guo, *Zhuangzi jishi*: 5/216). Sagacious people wander freely, undisturbed by anything that happens. That is to take nourishment from *tian*, which we might here translate as “nature” or even “the way things are.” Because they are content in every circumstance, they have no need to force the world to change. The human, then, is associated with the social mechanisms directed toward changing the world—knowledge, pledges or oaths, virtue (*de* 德), and craft. In aligning with heaven, sages not only escape the confines of wisdom and craft but also free themselves from any essential or natural human feelings: “they have human form but do not have natural human feelings. Having human form, they flock with humans. Not having natural

human feelings, affirming [*shi*] and negating [*fei*] do not reach to their person" (Guo, *Zhuangzi jishi*: 5/216).

The term translated as "natural human feelings" is *qing* 情. It can mean what is genuine or essential, but we have encountered the term already with a more specific meaning. In "Dispositions," *qing* are the feelings that spontaneously arise from dispositions, *xing*. The dialogue with Huizi follows as a clarification:

Huizi said, "If a human being has no natural feelings, by what do you call them human?" Zhuangzi said, "The way gives them an appearance, heaven gives them a form—why can you not call them human?" Huizi said, "Since you call them human, how can they not have natural feelings?" Zhuangzi said, "Affirming [*shi*] and negating [*fei*] are what I call natural feelings. What I call having no natural feelings refers to people not letting loves and hates inside to harm their persons. They do not add to life but constantly rely on what is spontaneously so of itself." (Guo, *Zhuangzi jishi*: 5/220–22)

Huizi makes the same point Mengzi would make—without natural human feelings, one cannot be considered human. Zhuangzi responds in two ways. First, he asserts a different definition of the human. These sages still have human bodies (form and appearance) and they gather together with other human beings. In these senses, they can be considered human. Second, he clarifies what he means by lacking natural human feelings. The foundation is the role of evaluative judgments, first presented as affirming (*shi*) and negating (*fei*), and then in terms of loving (*hao* 好) and hating (*wu* 惡). These terms are closely connected to the *Mengzi*. Affirming and negating are the same terms used for the sprout of wisdom, and hating is paired with shame in the sprout of rightness (where I have translated it as "aversion" or "disgust").

Zhuangzi's view of the relationship between evaluative judgments and essential or natural feelings rests on two claims. The first is that

affective responses depend on implicit evaluations. This insight is not far from the view of Epictetus, who says: “what upsets people is not things themselves but their judgments about the things. For example, death is nothing dreadful (or else it would have appeared dreadful to Socrates), but instead the judgment about death is that it is dreadful—*that* is what is dreadful.”⁷ To feel concern for the child at the edge of a well, we must recognize that the child is in danger. To feel shame or aversion, we must judge that an action is wrong in the appropriate sense. Underlying many of these feelings is the judgment that death is bad and life is good, which is why that view is so often singled out in the text (and by Epictetus as well). The second claim is bound up with Zhuangzi’s emphasis on human diversity, discussed in the previous section. The way human beings evaluate things is highly variable, as any evaluation assumes a certain perspective on the world. This is expressed in a claim about the heart: “if we follow a completed heart and make it our authority, who alone is without an authority? . . . The foolish would also have one! Not yet completed in the heart but having affirmation [*shi*] and negation [*fei*]*—this is like leaving for the state of Yue today and arriving there yesterday*” (Guo, *Zhuangzi jishi*: 2/56). A “completed heart” (*chengxin* 成心) is a heart that has been formed with a fixed and limited perspective. We can only affirm and deny after such a perspective has been formed. That is why there can be no neutral judgments—to affirm or negate a given perspective would beg the question by assuming a perspective from which to make that judgment. Since affective responses require evaluation, they also depend on a formed perspective that is already in place. Much of the Inner Chapters consists of material meant to train the reader to break down their formed perspective and allow greater flexibility. Taken to its utmost, a sage becomes so flexible as to become free of any feelings that might define them as specifically human.

7 Epictetus, *Handbook*, tr. Nicholas P. White (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2012): 13 (sec. 5).

We can consider the famous example of the death of Zhuangzi's wife. Shortly after her death, Huizi comes to pay condolences but finds Zhuangzi happily singing and banging on a tub. Huizi accuses Zhuangzi of callousness, to which Zhuangzi responds:

It is not so! When she first died, how could I be so odd as to have no distress? But I looked to her beginning and that originally she was without life. Not only was she without life, originally she had no form. Not only did she have no form, originally she had no vital energies. Intermingling in the indefinite and vague, change happened and there was vital energy; vital energy changed and there was form; form changed and there was life; now there has been another change and she is dead. This is like the progression of the four seasons—spring, fall, winter, summer. There she sleeps, reclining peacefully in a large chamber. If I wept and wailed in following her tearfully, I myself considered that it would have been not aligning with fate [*ming*]. So I stopped. (Guo, *Zhuangzi jishi*: 18/614–15)

Zhuangzi deliberately brings about a shift in perspective. We might say that his original perspective leads him to regret or oppose (*fēi*) the death of his wife. That makes him upset. In response, he seeks a new perspective, one broader than the human. He focuses on the way what is fated lies outside human control, the place of human life in the broader cycles of nature, and an expanded temporal framework in which the lives of him and his wife are just moments. In all these cases, Zhuangzi takes comfort from seeing the insignificance of the human in the broader context of nature/*tian*. From that view, he sings.

MENGZI AND ZHUANGZI ON WHAT DEFINES THE HUMAN

Mengzi's minimal definition of human beings appeals to a set of basic affective responses that underlie sociality and the formation of communities and culture. Zhuangzi need not deny these basic affects, but

he would argue that they are more diverse than Mengzi assumes. Even greater diversity appears as our dispositions become intertwined with cultural and political forces. Even if all human beings share a disposition to feel shame, the actions seen as shameful differ widely across cultures. The same would apply to the ways feelings of compassion are expressed or the forms taken by whatever dispositions lead to ritual and wisdom. Mengzi recognizes this gap. The move from the sprouts to the virtues requires internalizing the specific cultural forms developed over time by exceptionally wise people of the past, the sages. We develop the proper feelings exemplified by sages like Yao and Shun by taking up their particular framework for evaluating the world. These cultural forms are justified as expressions of the common human dispositions. Consider the following dialogue, which comes not from the *Mengzi* but the *Lunyu* 論語, commonly known as the *Analects*. It begins with Zai Wo arguing that the three-year period of mourning a parent should be reduced to one year. Kongzi (Confucius), referred to simply as “the master,” responds as follows: “the master said: ‘In eating fine rice and wearing embroidered clothes, would you feel at ease?’ ‘I would,’ replied Wo. ‘If you would feel at ease, then do it. Now, the noble, during the period of mourning, eat food but do not savor it, hear music but do not delight in it, rest at home but are not at ease, and so they do not do them. Now if you would be at ease, then do them’” (17.21).⁸ Kongzi allows that there might be some difference in feelings in such a situation and says that one should follow those feelings rather than perform the ritual insincerely. When Zai Wo leaves, though, Kongzi exclaims that he lacks the virtue of benevolence. Zai Wo is not just different or eccentric but bad. In the *Mengzi*, those who lack the proper cultivated feelings are compared to human beings with damaged bodies, like missing a limb (2A6) or having a crooked finger

8 Based on the Chinese text in Liu Baonan 劉寶楠, *Lunyu zhengyi* 論語正義 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), cited by passage number. For an English translation, see Edward Slingerland, *Confucius Analects, with Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003).

(6A12), or else said to be like animals (4B19). Given that the norms are drawn from what it means to be human, those who fall short must be in some sense less than human.

While Mengzi sees cultural forms as both shaping and reinforcing natural human dispositions, Zhuangzi turns the dependence of any affect on a specific framework or perspective in a more radical direction. Rather than cultivate a perspective that aligns our reactions with the great sages, we can loosen the grip of any single perspective. With that freedom, we can develop the ability to find a perspective from which to affirm whatever happens. That frees us from negative emotions such as grief, worry, and shame. The story of the death of Zhuangzi's wife is just one of many examples of people who welcome death without grief or fear. Mengzi would say that such reactions are inhuman, and in some senses Zhuangzi agrees. We have seen that sagacious people lack natural or essential human feelings (*qing*) and that they take their nourishment from heaven and so have no need for the human. Another passage says simply: "odd people are odd to humanity but match with heaven" (Guo, *Zhuangzi jishi*: 6/273). In another sense, though, the ability to take multiple perspectives and overcome the fear of death may be the most human thing about us. As noted earlier, all of the nonhuman animals in the dialogue between Wang Ni and Gaptooth seek benefit and avoid harm. Most human beings do the same, but the utmost people do not care about life and death. The term translated as "utmost people" is *zhiren* 至人. *Ren* is the term for human being. *Zhi* means to reach the limit, to be at a maximum, to arrive, or to be complete. While the phrase could mean those human beings who have reached the ultimate, *ren* is the object of *zhi*, so it reads most naturally as those who are fully or maximally human.

The contrast between Mengzi and Zhuangzi on what is distinctively human, then, is quite complex. Although Mengzi valorizes the particularity of human beings as defined by common dispositions, his arguments appeal to similarities between human beings and other animals. The social affects based in the heart distinguish human beings, but in

the same way that dogs and chickens can be distinguished by their various tastes in food, shelter, and a choice of mates. It is this very continuity, this idea of human beings as differing only by the specificity of their instincts, that makes Mengzi's account contrast so strongly with attempts to define the human through free will or rationality. In contrast, for Zhuangzi, what is most distinctively human is precisely that which allows us to escape the bounds of any natural human perspective. There is a unique degree of freedom in the ability of sages to determine their reactions to the world, and this freedom ultimately follows from a cognitive ability to frame events from different perspectives. These abilities, though, do not lead to a belief in human superiority. On the contrary, they are just what allow one to recognize and reject anthropocentrism. For Zhuangzi, the most human thing about us is the fact we can know that our concerns, our concepts, and our rules have no significance beyond what we give to them.



FIGURE 5 Illustration from Zakariya al-Qazwini, *ʿAjāʾib al-makblūqāt wa-gharāʾib al-mawjūdāt* (*Marvels of Things Created and Miraculous Aspects of Things Existing*) (13th century)

CHAPTER 4

The Nature of Human and Nonhuman Animals in Classical Islamic Philosophy

ALFARABI AND AVICENNA

Luis Xavier López-Farjeat

The similarities between human and nonhuman animals were addressed by several Islamic philosophers interested in exploring the animality of human nature and, at the same time, in establishing the distinctive features of human beings. Inspired by Aristotle's theory of the soul, Alfarabi (d. 950) and Avicenna (d. 1037), two major philosophers of the classical Islamic philosophical tradition, provide an explanation of the distinctive operations of human and nonhuman animals, according to the differences in their respective souls. The soul is the principle through which living beings are alive and have different faculties such as nutrition, reproduction, sense perception, desire, and reasoning. Nonhuman animals and plants share the most basic capacities, such as nutrition and reproduction. Sense perception and desire, however, are powers that pertain to nonhuman and human animals.

Within his biological treatises Aristotle conceived a *scala naturae* according to which inferior nonhuman animals possess at least the sense of touch while higher forms of life, for instance mammals, have external senses and more complex cognitive capacities such as common sense, memory, and imagination. Human animals share the capacities performed by plants and nonhuman animals, although in the particular case of human animals an exclusive faculty is added, that of thinking or reasoning.¹

Reasoning not only allows human animals to obtain intelligible forms or concepts but also is involved in three other capacities: (1) self-awareness, (2) the articulation of language, and (3) the search for perfection and happiness in political associations. Although these capacities seem to be distinctive features of human animals, in several places within their philosophical works, Alfarabi and Avicenna refer to the cognitive skills displayed by some nonhuman animals, their mental conceptions of the world, as well as their ability to produce some sort of language, and even to organize themselves in what seem to be political associations.

In this essay I present the similarities and differences between human and nonhuman animals in order to provide a proper characterization of what it means to be a human being according to both of these Islamic philosophers. In the first section I explain the characteristics of the sense perceptive and intellectual souls, introducing a relevant aspect that will serve to distinguish between human and nonhuman animals, namely, self-awareness (*al-shu'ūr bi-al-dhāt*); in the second section, I deal with the capacity to articulate language among human and even some nonhuman animals; in the third section I discuss the characterization of human beings as *zōon politikon* (*hayawān madanī*), defining in which sense this feature is essential to human nature. Finally, I offer

¹ See L. X. López-Farjeat, "Body, Soul, and Sense in Nature," in *The Routledge Companion to Islamic Philosophy*, ed. R. C. Taylor and L. X. López-Farjeat (London: Routledge, 2016), 168–82.

some concluding remarks regarding the notion of “human being” in the Islamic philosophical tradition.

SENSE PERCEPTION AND SELF-AWARENESS

As mentioned, most theories of the human soul and its faculties within the classical Islamic philosophical context were built upon Aristotle's *De anima* but also drew from related treatises such as the *Parva naturalia* and the zoological writings.² Through these treatises devoted to the investigation of living beings, Islamic philosophers learnt that the study of the soul was part of the natural sciences. There were, however, different approaches to the Aristotelian conception of the soul, some of which, as is the case with Alfarabi and Avicenna, display a strong Platonic vein coming from the influence of philosophers such as Plotinus, Porphyry, and Proclus.³

2 Regarding the transmission of Aristotle's *Parva Naturalia* into the Arabic context see Rotraud Hansberger, “The Transmission of Aristotle's *Parva Naturalia* in Arabic” (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2007), and “*Kitāb al-Ḥiss wa-l-maḥsūs*: Aristotle's *Parva Naturalia* in Arabic Guise,” in *Les Parva naturalia d'Aristote: Fortune antique et médiévale*, ed. C. Grellard and P.-M. Morel (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2010), 143–62. For interesting works discussing philosophical difficulties within the Arabic *Parva naturalia* see Rotraud Hansberger, “Representation of Which Reality? ‘Spiritual Forms’ and ‘Ma’āni’ in the Arabic Adaption of Aristotle's *Parva Naturalia*,” 99–121; Emma Gannagé, “Dreams, Providence and Reality: Comments on Hansberger, ‘Representation of Which Reality?’,” in *The Parva Naturalia in Greek, Arabic, and Latin Aristotelianism*, 123–32; and Olga Lizzini, “Representation and Reality: On the Definition of Imaginative Prophecy in Avicenna,” 133–54, all in *The Parva Naturalia in Greek, Arabic, and Latin Aristotelianism: Supplementing the Science of the Soul*, ed. B. Bydén and F. Radovic (Cham, Switzerland: Springer). Concerning Aristotle's zoological treatises (*History of Animals*, *Parts of Animals*, and *Generation of Animals*): these were integrated into a single work under the title *Book of Animals* (*Kitāb al-hayawān*). The *Progression of Animals* seems not to have been translated.

3 Alfarabi wrote several treatises, including the *Epistle on the Intellect* (*Risālat fi al-'aql*) and *The Principles and Opinions of the People of the Virtuous City* (*Mabādi' āra' ahl al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*), in which he develops his conception of the soul (see L. X. López-Farjeat, “Al-Farabi's Psychology and Epistemology,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2016; substantive revision, 2020), accessed November 12, 2017, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/al-farabi-psych/>). Although Alfarabi made relevant contributions to the understanding of the nature of the soul, scholarly literature has dealt much more with Avicenna's approach. As is the case with Alfarabi, in some of Avicenna's writings, such as the *De anima* in his major work *The Healing* (*Shifā': al-Nafs*), the psychological section of *The Salvation* (*Najāt*), and others, Avicenna provides a more Platonic conception of the soul. Influenced mainly by the *Theology of Pseudo-Aristotle*, an adapted translation of Plotinus's *Enneads* 4–6, he distances himself to some extent from Aristotle's *De anima*

Both Alfarabi's and Avicenna's definitions of the soul are closely related to Aristotle's *De anima* 2.1, 412a19. As is well known, Aristotle defines the soul as the form or actualization (*entelecheia*, in Greek; *tamām*, *kamāl*, or *istikmāl*, in Arabic) of a natural organic body that potentially has life. For his part, Alfarabi states that "the soul is that by which the animate substance—I mean that which admits of life—is realized as substance,"⁴ and Avicenna holds that "the soul is not a body but its perfection."⁵ Following Aristotle, both philosophers hold that there are different kinds of soul according to the different faculties of living beings.

Alfarabi provides an account of the faculties of the human soul, from the lowest and most basic, namely nutrition, to the highest and most perfect, that is, the rational or intellective faculty.⁶ Nutrition is shared by plants, animals, and human beings; next there is a group of faculties, the external senses (touch, taste, smell, hearing, and sight), which are shared by humans and the higher nonhuman animals. Along with these sense perceptive faculties there is also the appetitive faculty, through which human and nonhuman animals experience desire toward or aversion from the objects they perceive through the senses. Then, proceeding to the internal senses, Alfarabi lists the imaginative faculty, whose function is to retain the sensible impressions when these are no longer present to the external senses. This faculty also has the capacity to combine sensible impressions with each other, to connect and disconnect them in different compositions and divisions, some of

arguing that the soul should be conceived of as an independent, individuated, and immortal substance (see Dimitri Gutas, "Avicenna: The Metaphysics of the Rational Soul," *Muslim World* 102 (2012): 417–25).

4 Alfarabi, "The Philosophy of Aristotle," in *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, trans. C. E. Butterworth (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 116.

5 Avicenna, *Shifā': al-Nafs* 1.2. I am using *Avicenna's De Anima, Being the Psychological Part of Kitāb al-Shifā'*, ed. F. Rahman (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).

6 Alfarabi, *Mabādi' ānā' abl al-madīnah al-fāḍilah (al-Farabi on the Perfect State)*, trans. R. Walzer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 164–75.

them false and some true.⁷ The imaginative faculty is also related to the appetitive faculty given that it is possible to desire imaginative representations. Finally, last and highest in Alfarabi's account is the rational or intellective faculty (*'aql*).

Both human and nonhuman animals have sense perception so that they can receive the impressions produced by external objects and, through the imaginative faculty, can retain sensible forms while no longer in contact with the external world. Animals are able to react to the external world because they possess sensation and imagination, so they can experience pleasure and pain, or detect those situations that are damaging or dangerous for them. Now, in the case of human beings, in addition to the imaginative faculty, the rational faculty is essential for cognition: human cognition is characterized not by the mere attainment of sensible forms but, rather, by the attainment of intelligible forms. In other words, this means that human beings are able to "conceptualize," to grasp intelligible forms instead of only attaining images, as would be the case for nonhuman animals.⁸

7 Alfarabi, *Mabādi' ārā' abl al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*, 168–69.

8 Here, I shall not develop in detail Alfarabi's doctrine on the intellect. It is enough to mention that he is following the Peripatetic tradition, especially Alexander of Aphrodisias, and he divides the intellect into potential intellect (*'aql bi al-quwah*), actual intellect (*'aql bi al-fi'l*), acquired intellect (*'aql al-mustafād*), and active or agent intellect (*'aql al-fa'āl*). See Alfarabi, "On the Intellect," in *Classical Arabic Philosophy: An Anthology of Sources*, trans. J. McGinnis and D. C. Reisman (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 68–78 (this division appears at 70–71). For the Arabic see Alfarabi, *Risalat fi al-'aql* (*Letter on the Intellect*), ed. M. Bouyges (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1938), 9–11. See Herbert Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect: Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 48–63, 65–70; Marc Geoffroy, "La tradition arabe du Πρῶτον νοῦ d'Alexandre d'Aphrodise et les origines de la théorie farabienne des quatre degrés de l'intellect," in *Aristotele e Alessandro di Afrodisia nella Tradizione Araba*, ed. C. D'Ancona and G. Serra (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2002) 191–231; Phillippe Vallat, *Farabi et l'École D'Alexandrie* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2004), 33–42. In general terms what Alfarabi describes is a process in which an external intellect (the active or agent intellect) turns the potential intellect into an actual intellect and, at the same time, turns the potential intelligible forms into actual intelligible forms. He explains this process through an analogy: the relation between the active or agent intellect and the potential intellect resembles the sun and the faculty of sight. The active intellect provides a sort of flow of light whereby the human intellect is actualized, thus grasping intelligible forms or concepts.

The intellective faculty not only allows the attainment of intelligible forms: it is also the faculty through which human beings attain the sciences and the arts, and through which they are able to discern between good and bad habits and good and bad deeds. By this faculty humans are able to reflect on whether something should be done and can recognize what is useful, pleasant, and harmful.⁹ Although Alfarabi does not provide a detailed explanation of the meaning of “reflection,” clearly it is a rational act that differentiates human and nonhuman animals. The difference, however, is not as simple as it might appear. Although nonhuman animals do not conceptualize, notice that they are able to grasp some “meanings,” such as pleasure, pain, danger, and damage, in the external world. This means that nonhuman animals are aware of some states of affairs in the external world and react consequently. However, it seems that according to Alfarabi, they are unable to reflect on this state of affairs and hence cannot produce theoretical and practical knowledge as human beings do.

Although rational knowledge appears to be the main, radical difference between human and nonhuman animals, and seems to suggest that human knowledge is more complex and sophisticated, this does not exclude the fact that, as I will show in the following sections, in a way, nonhuman animals display cognitive capacities, since they are able to express their mental states by means of meaningful sounds, and some types of animal are even able to organize their life in association with others of the same species in order to complete their own needs.¹⁰

Avicenna provides a more detailed explanation of the connection between rationality and reflexivity or self-awareness. Also following Aristotle, he posits three kinds of soul according to the capacities that living beings can perform: the vegetative soul (with capacities such as

⁹ Alfarabi, *Mabādi' āra' abl al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*, 165.

¹⁰ Alfarabi detects several characteristics of animal capacities and behavior; however, from the psychological point of view, Avicenna's analysis of the cognitive faculties provides more information regarding the mental life of nonhuman animals as well as its similarities to and distinctions from that of human beings.

nutrition, reproduction, and growth), the sense perceptive soul (with capacities shared by human and nonhuman animals, such as the motive and the external and internal sense perceptive ones), and the rational or human soul (endowed with all the former capacities, but with an extra and exclusive one, that is, the capacity of thought).¹¹

Avicenna devotes a number of pages within his psychological treatises to explain sense perception, one of the operations human and nonhuman animals share. He understands sense perception (*idrāk* or *ḥiss*) as the extraction of the form of sensible objects.¹² The term *idrāk* can be translated as “to grasp” or “to apprehend.” This process of extraction is also what he means by “abstraction” (*tajrīd*). Sense perceptive knowledge consists in the mind’s capacity to apprehend or separate something from an external object depending on the degree of abstraction: the form (*ṣūra*) of an external object, nonmaterial properties in the external objects called intentions (*ma‘ānī*), and intelligible forms or concepts (*ma‘qūlāt*). The bodily faculties—that is, the external and internal senses—are necessary for the extraction of forms, intentions, and intelligible forms, but at a certain point they become no longer necessary: Avicenna conceives of the human intellect as an immaterial substance that needs the body for its origination,¹³ and for the knowledge of intelligible forms; however, once the human intellect has attained intelligible forms, the body becomes an obstacle to perfect knowledge. In other words, perfect knowledge goes beyond the bodily powers and consists in knowing nonindividuated intelligible forms or universal essences.

11 Avicenna, *Avicenna’s Psychology* (English Translation of the *Kitāb al-Najāt II, VI*), trans. F. Rahman (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 25.

12 Avicenna, *Avicenna’s Psychology*, 25–26; *Shifā’ al-Nafs* 1.2, 58–74.

13 Avicenna explains that the soul comes forth from the active or agent intellect, which is responsible for an emanative process where the form, that is, the soul, is originated concurrently with matter, that is, with the body. In other words, the origination of the soul happens simultaneously with a natural process: the harmonic mixture of the elements (earth, water, air, and fire) that give rise to different bodies with the potentiality to perform a diversity of operations. The more harmonious or balanced this mixture is, the more complete are the operations a body is able to perform.

The fact that the human rational intellect distances itself from the body is indicative of Avicenna's conception of the body and the soul as two different substances, taking, then, a dualistic approach. Avicenna constantly insists on the differentiation of body and soul, while also claiming that the soul originates simultaneously with the body and that sense perception in human and nonhuman animals is only possible through the body and its faculties. Like Aristotle and Alfarabi, Avicenna divides the sense perceptive faculties into two parts: external and internal. The external senses perceive forms and, according to Avicenna's account, encompass the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch.¹⁴ In all these cases, external sensation (*ḥiss*) consists in the apprehension of the sensible forms of perceptual objects through a sense organ. Regarding internal perception, Avicenna lists more internal faculties than Alfarabi. Whereas, as mentioned, Alfarabi assigns several functions to the imaginative faculty, Avicenna distinguishes several faculties with different functions and refers to them as "powers of the mind." These are common sense (*ḥiss al-mushtarak*), which receives the forms provided by the external senses; retentive imagination (*al-khayāl*), whose function is to retain images; the estimative power (*wahm*), which receives the intentions that are retained by memory (*dhikr*); the compositive imagination (*mutakhayyilah*), a permanently active faculty that composes and divides forms as well as intentions; and, when the human rational intellect commands the compositive imagination, the "cogitative" (*mufakkirah*). All these faculties are located in the brain, so they have a bodily basis. These internal faculties are needed in the rational cognitive process, since they provide the forms and the intentions required for the knowledge of intelligible forms.

14 Unlike Alfarabi, Avicenna conceives of four different kinds of tactile sensations, namely, hot and cold, dry and moist, hard and soft, rough and smooth, considering this division of touch into four faculties, thus listing eight external senses.

Aside from the cogitative power, the remaining internal faculties are common to human and nonhuman animals. This means that nonhuman animals have some cognitive capacities, that is, they are able to react to states of affairs in the external world and direct their behavior according to particular situations. Through their estimative power, the highest faculty in them, nonhuman animals perceive nonmaterial properties which are in the perceptible objects. And this is what Avicenna calls “intentions” (*ma‘ānī*), that is, properties or meanings that the estimative power perceives of the sensible object but that cannot be reduced to mere sensorial experience, as for example, when the sheep perceives “enmity” in the wolf immediately and then, as a consequence, experiences fear and runs away.¹⁵ This well-known example suggests that nonhuman animals are able to go beyond the information provided by external sensation and grasp some meanings that are nonconceptual. In other words, the lack of rational or intellective faculty does not prevent nonhuman animals from recognizing, discerning, and associating some state of affairs or meanings in the world and reacting as a consequence.

The estimative faculty helps us understand nonhuman animal behavior, which involves the recognition of some meanings that are commonly linked to their survival in such a way that they react to the world because they have an impulse for self-preservation. Avicenna’s observations about nonhuman animal cognition lead to another issue: if nonhuman animals are aware of the state of affairs in the world, do they then have some sort of self? Avicenna is ambivalent in this regard, but as several scholars have pointed out, it seems that he suggests a sort of primitive self-awareness for nonhuman animals.¹⁶ There are passages

¹⁵ Avicenna, *Avicenna’s Psychology*, 30.

¹⁶ See Deborah Black, “Avicenna on Self-Awareness and Knowing That One Knows,” in *The Unity of Science in the Arabic Tradition*, ed. S. Rahman et al. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), 63–87; Jari Kaukua, *Avicenna on Subjectivity*, 100–147 (Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, 2007); Jari Kaukua and Taneli Kukkonen, “Sense-Perception and Self-Awareness: Before and After Avicenna,” in *Consciousness: From Perception to Reflection in the History of Philosophy*, ed. S. Heinämaa et al. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 95–119; Jari Kaukua, *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy: Avicenna*

where Avicenna accepts this primitive self-awareness, a sort of “primitive consciousness” or some kind of self-preservation instinct that allows them to be aware of their sense perceptions, but not exactly to be aware of their “self.” The problem of the self in nonhuman animals is striking, given that it is not clear enough how it is possible for an animal to be aware of its own sense perceptions if it lacks a self. Avicenna is aware of this problem, so in some passages he claims that nonhuman animals are able to perceive their particular soul, but in others he asks whether this kind of self-awareness would have to be considered a “genuine” self-awareness, given that in nonhuman animals individuation is due to their materiality. Put simply, since nonhuman animals are confined to their own corporeality, it is pertinent to ask whether they are aware of their bodily experiences and even aware of the fact that they possess a body.

Given that nonhuman animals are what Avicenna calls “material forms” (that is, beings individuated by their corporeality and not by a form or an individuated soul), there are a number of texts where he affirms that their cognitive capacities are limited to sense perception and that this is what distinguishes them from human animals: the latter are not only capable of a higher degree of abstraction and the attainment of intelligible forms but also are capable of reflection. This last capacity, which is proper to the human rational soul, allows human animals to be aware of themselves and confirms the existence of the individual human soul or self. In *Shifāʾ: al-Nafs* 1.1 and 5.7, Avicenna formulates a thought experiment, an admonition (*tanabbaha*), known

and *Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 12–103; L. X. López-Farjeat, “Self-Awareness (*al-shuʿūr bi-al-dhāt*) in Human and Non-human Animals in Avicenna’s Psychological Writings,” in *Oikeiosis and the Natural Bases of Morality*, ed. A. Vigo (Hildesheim: Olms Verlag, 2012), 121–40, “¿Tienen los animales no humanos un ‘yo’? Una posible respuesta desde la filosofía de la mente de Avicenna,” *Signos Filosóficos* 30 (2013): 71–88; , and “Avicenna on Non-conceptual Content and Self-Awareness in Non-human Animals,” in *Subjectivity and Selfhood in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. J. Kaukua and T. Ekenberg (Switzerland: Springer, 2016), 61–73; Taneli Kukkonen, “Sources of the Self in the Arabic Tradition: Remarks on the Avicennan Turn,” in Kaukua and Ekenberg, *Subjectivity and Selfhood in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy*, 37–60.

as the “floating man argument,”¹⁷ which serves as evidence of the individuation of the human soul/self (*nafs/dhāt*).

The floating man argument invites us to imagine ourselves as created in a perfect fashion (i.e., with the perfect operation of all our faculties) but having our sight veiled so it is impossible for us to see external things; it has us imagine ourselves as suspended in midair and with our limbs separated from one another in such a way that we are not able to feel them. If one could suspend the perception of one’s own body and anything external to it, one would still be able, according to Avicenna, to affirm the existence of one’s own soul, which constitutes humans’ very essence. Whoever follows this thought experiment would conclude that “the essence whose existence has been affirmed is particular to him, since it is himself [*huwa bi-‘ayni-hi*] different from his body and his body parts, which were not affirmed. Therefore, he who has been instructed does have a way to affirm the existence of the soul [*nafs*] as something different from the body or, better said, without body.”¹⁸ Avicenna thinks that this thought experiment is a successful proof of the existence of the individual human soul as something evident and, of course, as something different from the body, thereby confirming his dualist conception of human beings. In several passages Aristotle states that it is impossible to talk about self-awareness unless the intellect has been previously actualized by an object;¹⁹ but Avicenna argues the opposite: we need to prove the existence of the soul/self if we want to be sure that we are able to perceive objects. This is why the floating man argument prescind from both external and internal sense perceptions.

From the experiment of the floating man Avicenna concludes that there is an innate and permanent self, different from the body, without which our sense perceptions would be impossible. In *Shifā’*: *al-Nafs*

17 Avicenna, *Shifā’*: *al-Nafs* 1.2, 4–16; 250–62; see M. E. Marmura, “Avicenna’s ‘Flying Man’ in Context,” *Monist* 69 (1986): 383–95.

18 Avicenna, *Shifā’*: *al-Nafs* 1.2, 16.

19 See Aristotle, *On the Soul* 417a 18–20; 429b 29–30 a1.

5.7 he emphasizes that the body would not be able to perceive by itself what it feels.²⁰ There, he also explains that, although the soul is distinct from the body, it acts through the body and in this sense the body is an instrument of the soul. With this dualistic position Avicenna confirms that the soul is an independent and subsisting substance that should not be confused with the body; in fact, the organization and coordination of the body depends on and comes from the soul. In the case of human beings, the soul is responsible for two operations: (1) a theoretical operation, which consists in the intellection of intelligible forms, and (2) a practical operation, which is related to rational choices, deliberations, and human actions.

Avicenna distinguishes four modes of interaction between the human intellect and intelligible forms. I will not explain in detail his complex and controversial theory of the intellect here. Previously, I have shown that he explains perceptive knowledge as an abstractive process. Nevertheless, this process does not fully explain how our intellect is able to transform the abstracted materials (forms, intentions, and intelligible forms) into nonindividuated intelligible forms. Simply put, how is it that we can know not only “this cat” but also its universal essence, that is, the “catness”? To provide a response, Avicenna holds the need for an external agent, the active or agent intellect (*‘aql al-fa‘āl*), who in Avicenna’s emanationist cosmological model is a separate intellect who provides the nonindividuated intelligible forms to the human intellect. Avicenna has, thus, two divergent models for explaining human knowledge, which have been intensively debated in secondary literature—namely, the abstractionist and the emanationist.²¹

20 Avicenna, *Shifā’ al-Nafs* 1.2, 250–53.

21 These two divergent models have been discussed by several scholars. Here, I only mention three articles that discuss the most relevant materials on the subject: Tommaso Alpina, “Intellectual Knowledge, Active Intellect and Intellectual Memory in Avicenna’s *Kitāb al-Nafs* and Its Aristotelian Background,” *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 25 (2014): 131–83; Richard C. Taylor, “Avicenna and the Issue of the Intellectual Abstraction of Intelligibles,” in *The History of the Philosophy of Mind*, vol. 2, *Philosophy of Mind in the Early and High Middle Ages*, ed. M. Cameron (New York: Routledge 2019), 56–82; Stephen R. Ogden, “Avicenna’s

Here I will simply say that, according to the emanationist model, Avicenna thinks that, as rational beings, human animals have the capacity to receive immaterial intelligible forms—this is what the material intellect (*‘aql hayūlānī*) does—from a separate immaterial intellect known as the agent intellect.²² Once the agent intellect has provided the intelligible forms to the human intellect, Avicenna refers to the intellect as dispositional intellect (*‘aql bi al-malaka*); when the intelligible forms are already in the intellect but we are not actively thinking on them, Avicenna calls the intellect “actual intellect” (*‘aql bi al-fiʿl*); finally, when we are actually thinking, the intellect is then called “acquired intellect” (*‘aql mustafād*). The simplest way to put together Avicenna’s two divergent cognitive models is to understand that the apprehension of intelligible forms is prompted by sense perception but comes about through a conjoining with the separate agent intellect.²³ Through this conception of intellectual understanding it is clear that human cognition goes beyond the bodily powers and that it happens to be much more sophisticated than nonhuman animal cognition. However, intellectual cognition and reflexive self-awareness are not the only characteristics that define human beings. The articulation of language and the natural tendency to live in association are also considered distinctive features of human animals, as I will show.

Emanated Abstraction,” *Philosophers’ Imprint* 30 (2020): 2–26. Recently, I have revisited this discussion trying to relate it to contemporary epistemology, in L. X. López-Farjeat, “Avicenna on Information Processing and Abstraction,” in *Information and the History of Philosophy*, ed. C. Meyns (New York: Routledge, 2021), 123–36.

22. Avicenna’s terminology, “material intellect” and “active or agent intellect,” is equivalent to Aristotle’s “passive intellect” and “active intellect,” respectively, in *De anima* 3.5. While the material intellect is in potency to abstract forms from their matter, the active or agent intellect actualizes the potential material intellect. In the case of Avicenna, this actualization can be understood in different ways. Sometimes he suggests that it consists in providing the intelligible forms; other times he suggests that the agent intellect provides the first principles of reasoning, and sometimes it seems that it only actualizes the power of abstraction.

23. Avicenna, *Shifāʾ: al-Nafs* 1.2, 246–47.

THE ARTICULATION OF LANGUAGE

Considerations about language among Islamic philosophers are once again heavily influenced by Aristotle's natural and logical treatises.²⁴ In the *De anima* Aristotle introduces the necessity of the imagination as an internal faculty related to the voice and essential for conceiving meaningful voices. He argues that although voice is the sound produced by living creatures physiologically endowed to emit it, not every sound produced by these creatures is a voice. (For instance, a sound emitted with the tongue or coughing are sounds but not voices.) The emission of the voice implies, according to the *De anima*, two conditions: (1) the presence of a sensitive soul, and (2) the use of imagination (*phantasia*). Through imagination, voice or vocal sound has meaning (*sēmantikos psophos*), that is, the expression of a mental state that reflects external objects.²⁵ Meaning (*sēmainein*) cannot be explained as a merely physiological operation but through the intervention of an internal faculty. Imagination is necessary for meaningful voices, but that does not imply that a meaningful sound entails articulate language. This will be precisely Avicenna's position. The *De anima* is consistent with *De interpretatione* 16a27–29, where Aristotle states that nonhuman animals can only generate inarticulate voices, that is, meaningful sounds, but this does not mean that they are able to articulate language. There, where Aristotle explains the articulation of language, he posits four conditions for it: (1) the capacity to perceive the external world; (2) the capacity to produce mental conceptions of that world; (3) the capacity to produce voices or language that are signs of these mental conceptions; and (4) the capacity to translate these signs from our mental conceptions into both written and spoken language.

²⁴ I have explored this subject in greater detail in L. X. López-Farjeat, "The 'Language' of Non-human Animals in al-Fārābī and Avicenna," in *The Origin and Nature of Language and Logic. Perspectives in Medieval Islamic, Jewish, and Christian Thought*, ed. N. Germann and S. Harvey (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 173–91.

²⁵ See Aristotle, *On the Soul* 420b29–421a1.

Aristotle claims that spoken or articulate language is nothing but conventional signs of mental conceptions, and it appears that human beings are the only ones able to utter articulate language. Although nonhuman animals, according to Aristotle, have mental conceptions of the world—images, representations, and intentions—they are not able to conventionally link them to the kind of voices they emit. Hence, Aristotle concludes that nonhuman animals are unable to produce articulate language. Certainly, this appears to be Aristotle's conclusion, and if this is the case one important difference between human and nonhuman animals would be the capacity of humans to articulate language and the lack of articulate language in nonhuman animals. However, as I've already shown, Alfarabi and Avicenna admit that nonhuman animals have mental conceptions of the world. But what about language?

In his *Long Commentary on the De interpretatione*,²⁶ Alfarabi discusses Aristotle's *De interpretatione* 16a27–29, the passage where it is stated that nonhuman animals can only produce inarticulate voices and cannot articulate language. Alfarabi adopts Aristotle's conditions for the articulation of language, explained in a slightly different manner: (1) the capacity to perceive the external world, that is, sense-objects outside the soul; (2) a soul able to elaborate thoughts (*ma'qūlāt*), images (*ṣūrāt*), and representations (*mutakhayilāt*) of this external world; and finally (3) oral and written expressions. Aristotle's aim at the beginning of his treatise is, according to Alfarabi, to explain the relation of speech to thought and that of written word to speech. In the opening lines of the *De interpretatione* Aristotle affirms that “spoken sounds”²⁷

26 See Alfarabi, *Alfarabi's Commentary on Aristotle's "Peri Hermeneias" (De interpretatione)*, ed. W. Kutsch and S. Marrow (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1960). In some parts I follow Zimmermann's translation with small emendations (see Alfarabi, *Al-Farabi's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, trans. F. W. Zimmermann (London: Oxford University Press, 1981). I have also discussed this passage in “El 'lenguaje' de los animales no humanos en el comentario de al-Fārābī a *De Interpretatione* de Aristóteles,” *Diánoia* 77 (2016): 39–52.

27 The Greek for “spoken sounds” is *phōné*, which could mean voice, sound, and even expression. Alfarabi uses the word *ṣawt*. In Arabic *ṣawt* is used for voice or sound, and *lafẓ* for “expression”

are symbols of affections in the soul,²⁸ and written marks symbols of spoken sounds.”²⁹ “Affections in the soul” refers to mental content, that is, to the forms, images, and representations stored by inner faculties such as imagination and memory. Hence, these traces are residues of sense perception, and speeches or languages are symbols of those affections in the mind, while written marks are symbols of spoken language. In the context of this treatise, language is what signifies the contents in one’s mind. However, at the same time, language signifies or refers to the world outside the soul.

Alfarabi understands that the relation between spoken language and written language, and the relation between spoken language and the “affection in the soul,” is absolutely conventional, that is, its origin is social practice. This is the same position he holds in his *Book of Letters*, where he deals with the emergence of letters and utterances in different nations.³⁰ There, Alfarabi explains that human beings in their natural state, that is, left to themselves, start moving toward what they need, and this is how they embark upon knowing, thinking about, forming concepts, imagining, and understanding everything for which, by their own nature, they have disposition. In other words, every human being has a natural disposition and the proper constitution to know the external world.³¹ Now, when human beings need to communicate to others what is in their minds, they will first use signs or gestures, but later on they will use speech-sounds or voices. Initially, according to Alfarabi, voices are used as a means to address and communicate

or “utterance.” The distinction is important because, as Zimmermann points out, it was a matter of discussion among translators (see Alfarabi, *Al-Farabi’s Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle’s “De Interpretatione,”* p. lxxiv).

28 This is what Aristotle refers to as *pathémata tés psychés* and Alfarabi as *āthār*, or “traces,” in the soul.

29 See Aristotle, *Peri Hermeneias* 16a1–4; Alfarabi, *Alfarabi’s Commentary on Aristotle’s “Peri Hermeneias”* (“*De Interpretatione*”), 24–25; Alfarabi, *Al-Farabi’s Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle’s “De Interpretatione,”* 10–11.

30 Alfarabi, *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf*, ed. M. Mahdi (Beirut: Dar el-Mashreq, 1969).

31 Alfarabi, *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf*, 115.

something. In this action one employs signs and gestures that point to the external world as a means to express the internal contents of one's mind. Afterward, each sign or gesture pointing at a specific object will in turn be accompanied by a specific voice or speech-sound, which will become the word signifying a given object.³²

In order for the production of voice to take place, a series of physiological preconditions are needed: the mechanical structure of the different organs, such as the pharynx and the lungs, as well as the disposition of the throat, the mouth, the tongue, and the lips, which are essential for the production of voice.³³ Furthermore, Alfarabi points out that this particular organic disposition differs from region to region, and also according to the different characters and temperaments of the people dwelling in a certain geographical area. This would explain the emergence of distinct languages in different nations: the primary speech-sounds that are used by different people in different regions, to express to one another what they have in mind, differs according to their physiological disposition to utter specific sounds, namely, alphabetical letters (*hurūf*).³⁴ These letters will not suffice for the expression of all of what is in the mind, and this lack leads to the need of connecting letters in order to create more complex speech-sounds.³⁵ This is, in fact, the origin of nouns, which corresponds to Aristotle's account in the *De interpretatione*. Alfarabi comments on this text of Aristotle, where a definition of "noun" is offered, namely, an "expression ["spoken sound," in Aristotle's text] signifying by convention, stripped of time, none of whose parts signifies in separation."

Alfarabi explains that, according to Aristotle, sound is not the genus of "expression" but the genus of "letters." Letters are made up of sounds, and letters constitute expressions, which become nouns or names when

³² Alfarabi, *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf*, 116.

³³ Alfarabi, *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf*, 117.

³⁴ Alfarabi, *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf*, 118.

³⁵ Alfarabi, *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf*, 119.

signifying by convention.³⁶ Now, according to Alfarabi, in *De interpretatione* 16a27–29 Aristotle says: “we have said ‘by convention’ because no noun is a noun by nature unless it becomes a sign [*symbolon* in the Greek]. For we find that even inarticulate noises [*agrammatoi psophoi*, “unwriteable noises,” in Aristotle’s text] may signify [*déloun*, “indicate,” in Greek] something, for example sounds of beasts; but none of them is a noun.” To put it plainly, what Aristotle holds is that although inarticulate noises of nonhuman animals may signify something, this does not mean that these expressions are nouns; nouns can only be so by convention. Alfarabi amends this position arguing that there are some cases where expressions are produced without convention, as is the case of many birds and other animals that, according to the *Book of Animals*, are able occasionally to produce sounds composed of letters. As Zimmermann points out, Alfarabi may be thinking of *History of Animals* 504b1–3 and *Parts of Animals* 660a29. In the first of these passages, Aristotle mentions that some birds possess the faculty of uttering articulate sounds, literally “letter-sounds” or “articulate sounds” (*grámmata phthéngetai*); and in the second passage, as mentioned earlier, he states again that some birds are able to pronounce letters.

Now, Alfarabi argues that if expressions are made out of letters, in the aforementioned cases the sounds that these nonhuman animals produce would actually be articulate expressions. Regarding nonhuman animals’ expressions Alfarabi holds that (1) some nonhuman animals, for instance, many birds, can produce sounds composed of letters unknown to us, and these are still articulate expressions; (2) there are some other nonhuman animals, such as goats and others, that produce sounds composed of letters known to us, and these are also articulate expressions; and (3) there are some animals, as is the case of the parrot and the magpie, which can learn human expressions with which they are not naturally endowed. Both (1) and (2) are cases

36 Alfarabi, *Alfarabi’s Commentary on Aristotle’s “Peri Hermeneias”* (“*De Interpretatione*”), 29; Alfarabi, *Al-Farabi’s Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle’s “De Interpretatione,”* 16.

where articulate expressions are natural and not by convention, while (3) is a simple case of imitation. Hence, according to Alfarabi, some sounds produced by nonhuman animals are articulate expressions that are not based on convention. Articulate expressions may be made up of natural sounds signifying the mental states of nonhuman animals, such as, for instance, their emotions (fear, pleasure, anger, etc.), which they often convey to other members of their species and even to other species. In this sense, the “sounds of beasts” would be considered in Aristotle’s passage of the *De interpretatione* as articulate expressions. Strikingly, in *The Perfect State* Alfarabi affirms several times that nonhuman animals lack speech and thought. Although this might seem an inconsistency, what Alfarabi wants to emphasize in *The Perfect State* is that through language human beings are able to externalize rational thoughts, something that nonhuman animals are unable to do. In any case, all the previous considerations regarding the “language” of the nonhuman animal in his commentary on the *De interpretatione* suggest that, particularly in this treatise, he thinks that “sounds of beasts” could be considered a kind of language.

Now, in the section devoted to the *De interpretatione* in the *Shifāʾ* Avicenna seems to subscribe to Aristotle’s position concerning the language of nonhuman animals.³⁷ He explains that what Aristotle means in 16a27–29 is that language is a verbal expression, that is, an expression composed of letters and meaningful by convention. Not every sound is a verbal expression. Nonhuman animals, according to Avicenna’s interpretation of Aristotle’s passage, are not able to produce verbal expressions, but they can utter sounds in order to manifest their awareness of some situations.³⁸ In the introduction to the section devoted to music

37 Avicenna, *al-Shifāʾ, al-Mantiq*, 3. *al-ʿIbārā*, ed. M. Khodeiry and I. Madkour (Cairo: Dar al-Katib al-Arabi, 1970). There is an English translation in Avicenna, *Avicenna/Ibn Sīnā, al-ʿIbārā, Avicenna’s Commentary on Aristotle’s “De Interpretatione,” Part One and Part Two*, trans. A. Bäck (Munich: Philosophia Verlag, 2013).

38 Avicenna, *al-Shifāʾ*, 11–12; *Avicenna/Ibn Sīnā, al-ʿIbārā, Avicenna’s Commentary on Aristotle’s “De Interpretatione,”* 36–37.

in the *Shifā'* Avicenna takes up this issue and holds that meaningful sounds, that is, voices, are essential for explaining nonhuman animal communication.³⁹ There, Avicenna explains that nonhuman animals have been naturally endowed with certain capacities to communicate with other members of their species.

Nonhuman animals have communicative skills that enable them to associate, to mate, and to communicate some experiences, such as danger. It is possible for them to have this kind of experience thanks to the estimative faculty, which as mentioned earlier, makes animals capable of experiencing both hostility and friendship, and of making the other members of their species aware of a given state of affairs. In the introduction to the *Book of Music*, where Avicenna explains the origin of music and harmony, he tangentially mentions relevant psychological aspects regarding the cognitive and communicative skills of nonhuman animals: (1) those nonhuman animals that are able to produce meaningful voices are those endowed with both external and internal perception, and (2) nonhuman animals are aware of those perceptions and are able to report them—as is the case of their experiences of danger or pleasure—through meaningful sounds. Once again, among the internal faculties, the one that plays a relevant role is the estimative power.

As mentioned previously, according to Avicenna nonhuman animals are able to detect external states of affairs and can react according to their own needs. This means, as Avicenna suggests, that they possess a primitive self-awareness.⁴⁰ In other words, nonhuman animals have an innate self-preservation impulse that enables them to be aware of their own corporeality and their own dispositions. This is why not only the sheep but every nonhuman animal keeps itself away from

39 Avicenna, *al-Shifā'*, *Jawāmi' 'ilm el-mūsīqā* I 1:4, 15–5.5 (*Mathématiques. 3. Musique*), ed. Z. Yousef (Cairo: Imprimerie Nationale, 1956).

40 Avicenna, *Mubāḥathāt* (*Investigations*), ed. A. R. Badawi (Cairo: Maktaba al-Nahada al-Masriya, 1947), 184, 305; *Shifā': al-Nafs* 1.2, 5.4, 234.

all that represents a danger to it; this is why every nonhuman animal seeks food, and not just any kind of food, but the sort that is suitable according to its organic disposition. A close reading of Avicenna's development of sense perception makes evident that there are phenomenological similitudes between the psychological capacities of human and nonhuman animals. As has been shown, both are aware of their sense perceptions. There is, however, a relevant difference, according to Avicenna's view in the *De interpretatione*: while human animals are able to utter verbal expressions, nonhuman animals are not, though they utter meaningful sounds.

Certainly, the meaningful sounds of nonhuman animals are not composed of nouns and verbs and, therefore, they cannot be considered articulate language or verbal expressions. Nevertheless if we consider Avicenna's statements concerning nonhuman animals' capacities to communicate or report the state of affairs in the outer world to other members of their species, we can infer that Avicenna, like Alfarabi, thinks that nonhuman animals' expressions can be considered to be some sort of language. As shown, Avicenna provides a detailed explanation of "animal minds," and in this regard he gives some psychological elements that can justify the presence of a natural or primitive "language." Although Avicenna shares Aristotle's view, that is, that nonhuman animals are able exclusively to utter meaningful sounds but not to articulate language or verbal expressions, his psychological approach is more elaborate than that of Aristotle himself and of Alfarabi. Therefore, in Avicenna's case there are more reasons to hold that language should not be limited to those animals able to build verbal expressions by convention; nonhuman animals' expressions are already a sort of primitive language, although it cannot be considered to be articulate language.

To sum up, the fact that nonhuman animals can utter sounds in order to manifest their awareness of some situations has the following implications: (1) there is an external world; (2) through the estimative power nonhuman animals are able to produce mental representations

of this external world; (3) they are aware of some events occurring in the external world and this implies that in this process of recognition they also have a primary self-awareness; (4) nonhuman animals have the natural capacity to link or translate intentions into mental states such as tendencies, aversions, fears, and pleasures that make them behave in particular ways; and (5) they are able to communicate to other members of their species these contents through meaningful sounds, and therefore, this means that some nonhuman animals are gregarious and live in close proximity to each other.

HUMANS AS POLITICAL ANIMALS

In the second part of one of his major works, *The Political Regime* (*Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-Madaniyya*), Alfarabi describes human beings as political animals searching for their perfection and happiness in associations, to the extent that they cannot complete their necessary affairs nor attain their most excellent state outside of these associations or communities dwelling in the same place.⁴¹ Although Alfarabi is mainly concerned with human political associations, by the end of the first part of *The Political Regime*, a part devoted to the metaphysical and cosmological structure of the universe, he makes some brief remarks regarding the association of nonhuman animals. Alfarabi mentions that some species of animals and plants “are able to gain their necessary affairs only by a group of individual members coming together in an association [*ijtimāʿ*].”⁴² In other words, there are some animals that come together with one another in order to fulfill their needs. Of course this is not the case for the whole animal kingdom. Alfarabi

⁴¹ See Alfarabi, *Kitāb al-siyāsa al-madaniyya* (Known as *the Treatise on the Principles of Beings or Political Regime*), ed. F. M. Najjar (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1964), 7; for an English translation see Alfarabi, *The Political Writings*, vol. 2, “*Political Regime*” and “*Summary of Plato’s Laws*,” trans. C. E. Butterworth (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 60. I use Butterworth’s translation, in some cases with slight modifications.

⁴² Alfarabi, *Kitāb al-siyāsa al-madaniyya*, 69; *The Political Writings*, 60.

himself observes that some animals isolate themselves even for procreation (as is the case of some sea animals), others isolate themselves except for procreation, and yet others do not isolate themselves and actually carry out all their activities in association (as is the case of some animals such as birds and bees).

This opening consideration in the second part of *The Political Regime* evokes Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*,⁴³ where it is said that associations are formed for the sake of something, namely, achieving a common goal. The distinction Alfarabi makes echoes *Politics* and *History of Animals*, where Aristotle classifies nonhuman animals as gregarious, independent, and social or political.⁴⁴ There are, according to this passage in Alfarabi, different kinds of associations, and among them there are some species that most of the time act together. The description in this passage simply depicts forms of natural association that serve as an introduction to explain a more sophisticated form of association, namely, the one that takes place in a city, that is, the proper human association. With this in mind, in this passage the term *ijtimā'* should be interpreted as the most natural and basic form of association based on reproduction. This would explain why he includes plants and some animals in this kind of association.

However, in the zoological realm there is a higher level of association than the reproductive that seems to be closely related to the way in which nonhuman animals are naturally organized even in those cases where they pursue a common goal, as in the case of ants, bees, and birds. Now, if some nonhuman animals are able to organize themselves in association, what is the difference between human and nonhuman political associations? This question is relevant to the issue of whether "being political" is an exclusive and essential feature of human nature. In order to suggest a possible answer to this question, one should consider, as mentioned earlier, that Alfarabi usually follows the same

43 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1160a28.

44 Aristotle, *Politics* 1.1, 1253a10; *History of Animals* 1.1, 488a2–4.

natural scale described by Aristotle when explaining the different kinds of soul (vegetative, sense perceptive, and rational souls).

At the most basic level Alfarabi refers to the necessity of animals' association with other members of their species precisely for the sake of reproduction or procreation. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* there is also a relation between association and reproduction. Aristotle explains that the friendship between husband and wife seems to be a natural instinct given that human beings are by nature pairing creatures. He distinguishes, however, between other pairing animals, whose aim is exclusively to continue the species, and human beings, whose aim appears to be more sophisticated, given that it is described as a combination of utility, pleasure, and virtue.⁴⁵

From the *Nicomachean Ethics* we can infer then that the purpose of human associations goes well beyond the preservation of the species. Although association in the case of nonhuman animals is described here as limited to the preservation of the species, in other places, as mentioned earlier, both Aristotle and Alfarabi make reference to some nonhuman animal associations that are characterized by a more complex form of organization that aims at achieving a common goal. At the most basic level the goal in the case of both human and nonhuman animals—and even in some plants—is the preservation of the species, but this does not exclude the necessity of association for the sake of achieving other goals. Thus far Alfarabi has explained the zoological dimension of association, and it seems that he is setting up a natural basis for association that may become gradually more sophisticated according to the capacities of each living being. If the different kinds of association emerge out of the natural capacities of living beings, and human animals are able to perform superior operations, then it seems to follow that human associations will be more sophisticated and presumably more perfect.

⁴⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1162a17–19.

Humans are among the species that are able neither to complete their necessary affairs nor gain their most excellent state outside of associations or communities dwelling in a single place. Alfarabi thinks that there are different kinds of human associations (villages, quarters, streets, houses, cities, nations), but he holds that the city is the first perfect association, while the most perfect would be the association of many nations.⁴⁶

Alfarabi provides a gradual description, from the most basic kind of association (based on reproduction and proper to the plants and the most basic nonhuman animals) to the more perfect associations, where specific planning is needed for the sake of community life and, in the case of human beings, for the sake of the pursuit of happiness among the inhabitants of the city. When describing the latter kind of association, Alfarabi focuses his analysis on the governing activities within the city and the different kinds of political regimes. The Greek *polis* is equivalent to the Arabic *madīnah*, and it seems that Alfarabi thinks that it is a natural result of human nature that emerges from a rational reflection on the best way to structure a political community designed to pursue the path to happiness.

Alfarabi holds that the inhabitants of the virtuous city are not able to attain happiness by themselves but only through the fulfillment of their corresponding tasks in the city under the guidance of the first ruler. Like Plato in his *Republic*, Alfarabi conceives a hierarchical structure for this society, and the first ruler is described as a citizen with superior natural, moral, and intellectual capacities. This “philosopher–first ruler,” so to speak, has attained the perfect happiness by means of an intellectual process through which he becomes progressively closer to the agent intellect. However, given that this ruler possesses not only theoretical wisdom but also practical wisdom, he will apply his knowledge to benefitting others. Alfarabi assumes, as do Plato and Aristotle,

46 Alfarabi, *Kitāb al-siyāsa al-madaniyya*, 69–70; *The Political Writings*, 60–61.

that the perfect activity for human beings combines contemplation with practical skills.

According to the previous explanation, what really characterizes human beings is their intellectual nature, which allows them to plan a more sophisticated social model in which the first ruler is aware of the cosmological hierarchical order and imitates it. Unlike nonhuman animals, which are unable to reflect on their lives in society, human animals need to transcend the zoological dimension of their sociability in order to attain happiness. This means that, although human beings have the tendency to live in association like other animals, they need to build a political regime that provides the necessary conditions to shape their nature in order to attain happiness. The perfect model is the virtuous regime. Nevertheless, as Alfarabi himself explains in the *Political Regime*, virtuous cities are rather uncommon; instead, one finds many nonvirtuous cities of different kinds: ignorant, immoral, and errant cities.⁴⁷

The nonvirtuous regimes are described as places where the actions of the inhabitants have not been directed toward happiness, so they acquire evil dispositions of the soul. Alfarabi is aware of the vulnerability of human nature to corruption. The eradication of evils and the proper governing of the city require laws. A virtuous ruler is, thus, a legislator who pursues the design of the best possible political regime. This engagement in designing a political regime goes beyond the mere natural association to preserve the species. When it comes to human beings, Alfarabi introduces another sense of “natural” that transcends the mere biological realm shared by human and nonhuman animals: human beings seek to achieve a finality that is beyond the biological realm, that is, the attainment of happiness. As Alfarabi points out, such a “natural,” intellectually driven desire for happiness finds its most perfect completion in the conjunction of the human intellect with the

47 Alfarabi, *Kitāb al-siyāsa al-madaniyya*, 87; *The Political Writings*, 76.

agent intellect, although this is only attainable by one who is suited for this, that is, the philosopher–first ruler.

By means of this conjunction the first ruler grasps the first theoretical and practical principles.⁴⁸ This is why he is qualified to govern the city, guiding the inhabitants toward the highest level of happiness they can attain as they fulfill their own natural dispositions. In light of the difference held by Alfarabi to exist between those who are called “by nature” to govern and those called “by nature” to be governed, we need to distinguish between two different senses of “nature.” The first is related to the zoological realm: “by nature” human beings are a kind of animal that lives in association. The second sense points to the different dispositions individual human beings possess, though still belonging to the same species. Accordingly, although all human beings seek happiness, each individual is drawn “by nature” to a certain kind of life that will fulfill his personal desire for happiness. The participation of each inhabitant of the community is a necessary condition for each one to attain his corresponding happiness.⁴⁹

It seems, however, that, as mentioned, what Alfarabi calls “political association,” namely the city and its respective regime, does not necessarily guarantee the happiness of all the members of this society. Following Aristotle, Alfarabi maintains that human beings have a natural tendency toward happiness that can be better fulfilled when being

48 According to Alfarabi, the first theoretical principles are already present in human thought, either by nature or without us being aware of how they are acquired. These principles are, as is explained in Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* 2.19, the principle of noncontradiction, the principle of excluded middle, and the principle that the whole is greater than the part. The first practical principles are those related to practical matters. These principles, as Aristotle explains in *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.6, are acquired through experience, and help to discern which deeds are good and which are not.

49 Unlike Aristotle, Alfarabi does not mention the case of slaves. There are few references to women. As Nadja Germann has noticed, in *Mabādi' āra' abl al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*, 197, Alfarabi holds that there no noticeable differences between men and women regarding sense perception, the imaginative faculty, and the faculty of reason. See Nadja Germann, “al-Farabi's Philosophy of Society and Religion,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2016; substantive revision, 2021), accessed July 23, 2021, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/al-farabi-soc-rel/>. Walzer concludes, thus, that we can infer that women, too, could be philosophers and rulers. See his commentary in Alfarabi, *Mabādi' āra' abl al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*, 400.

part of the city. Now, although the city is the ideal scenario for the attainment of happiness, this does not mean that the political regime, that is, the model whereby a society is organized into a city, ensures the fulfillment of humans' nature. Political models have a natural foundation, namely, humans' need to relate to and associate with one another, but those models are in fact conventional and imperfect. Although they are meant to allow for the organization of society so as to ease the inhabitants' attainment of happiness, this is seldom the case. In this sense, political regimes can paradoxically threaten the attainment of happiness. Alfarabi in his virtuous city models an ideal regime where the inhabitants would achieve their naturally driven desire of happiness. However, what in fact exists is a range of imperfect regimes where the virtuous people constantly struggle to achieve perfect happiness. Being a "political animal" implies, then, an engagement in the political regime for the purposes of both overcoming the deficiencies of imperfect regimes and struggling to imitate as closely as possible the perfect model of the universe.

Although Avicenna, unlike Alfarabi, did not write a political treatise, in his *Metaphysics* in his major work *The Healing* (*Shifā': al-Nafs*) he briefly deals with the characterization of human animals as "political animals." Echoing Alfarabi and hence Plato, Avicenna also refers to the necessity of human beings to live in association in a hierarchical community where the inhabitants perform specific tasks and work together for the benefit of all.⁵⁰ In his approach to this issue he reveals a relevant distinction between human and nonhuman animals, an aspect

⁵⁰ See Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, trans. M. E. Marmura (Provo, UT: Brigham University Press, 2005), 10.1–2, 358–65. *Metaphysics* 10.4, 370–74 is particularly interesting in its details of Avicenna's hierarchical society. The legislator divides the society into three groups: administrators, artisans, and guardians. Among the many things he legislates is marriage. When explaining the legislation in this regard, Avicenna holds that women are subordinated to their husbands; at the same time, men have an obligation to satisfy women's needs, mainly, their expenses. In another short political treatise, *On Governance*, Avicenna also refers to a man's governance over his wife, sons, and servants. As can be seen, his views on human associations were strongly hierarchical. See Avicenna, *On Governance*, in *Classical Arabic Philosophy: An Anthology of Sources*, trans. J. McGinnis and D. C. Reisman (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 224–37.

that certainly is also present in Alfarabi, that is, the divine origin of the laws. However, Alfarabi's commitment to Islam does not seem so clear and is in fact debated in secondary literature. In contrast, Avicenna shows a clear religious engagement that has an influence in his way of understanding the laws that regulate human behavior. Human beings, unlike animals, are able to understand that the laws governing the whole cosmos and nature, as well as those that should regulate human associations—if we want them to be fair—come from a superior and divine order, that is, divine providence.⁵¹

The Prophet, who is described as someone with the same qualities as the philosopher—first ruler in Alfarabi, is the only one who can lead human societies according to the divine prescriptions that have been revealed to him. Hence, the perfect society is governed by laws that have a divine origin, and these, besides encompassing ethical and social interactions, also include worship obligations.⁵² I shall not discuss in detail to what extent Avicenna is philosophically validating Islamic law. For the purposes of this essay, what I want to highlight is that human beings, unlike nonhuman animals, find in their ethical, political, and worship actions, a transcendent or religious motivation that is exclusive to rational beings.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The distinctive trait proper to human beings according to Alfarabi and Avicenna is certainly rationality. By means of the rational faculty human animals are able to grasp intelligible forms, that is, to conceptualize, but they can also reflect on themselves. This does not mean, however, that animals lack knowledge. As I have explained, both Alfarabi and Avicenna think that some animals are aware of some states of affairs in the world and react consequently to them. Avicenna even suggests

51 See Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, 10.2, 365–66.

52 See Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, 10.3, 367–68.

that animals could have some sort of primitive self-awareness. This being the case, the difference between human and nonhuman animals is gradual and based on the natural scale conceived by Aristotle in the *De anima*. In this scale the most difficult to define is the biological category of those living beings at the top of each category (vegetative, sensitive, and rational): just as there are plants that begin to manifest some sort of sensation, there are superior nonhuman animals whose cognitive capacities are close to the rational ones. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Alfarabi and Avicenna constantly contrast the nonhuman and human animal cognitive capacities, tracing their proximity, while at the same time stressing that nonhuman animals lack rationality.

Rationality allows human animals to articulate more complex forms of language than the expressions emitted by nonhuman animals. However, once again, both philosophers ask whether the sounds uttered by nonhuman animals are meaningful sounds. They conclude affirmatively, asserting that nonhuman animals have a mental life and that they constantly externalize their emotions.

Finally, regarding the tendency to live in association, it appears again that the difference between human and nonhuman animal associations is gradual. Rationality allows human beings to organize political communities where laws help lead human beings to the path of happiness. Human happiness is transcendent, and once again, rational animals are the only ones with theoretical and practical skills that allow them to realize the divine order behind the universe and the convenience of conforming themselves to this order.

In conclusion, according to Alfarabi and Avicenna, human animals are superior to nonhuman animals and to all other living beings. In this sense we can see that these two philosophers—and Islamic philosophy in general—tend to be intellectualist. The superiority of human animals is also present in other philosophers such as al-Rāzī, Avempace, Averroes, and others. It is also present among many Islamic theologians. However, the emphasis on the rational capacities of human

beings does not exclude the animality of human nature. Despite the great value of rationality, a permanent concern within intellectual circles in the Islamic context has to do with the question of why human reason fails: why our reasoning is sometimes wrong, why our language is frequently equivocal, why our societies are not perfect, why it is not easy to govern our passions and desires. In short, what are the implications of being rational?

In hac figura medie magnitudinis caput inter reliqua cum leonino capite contemplare.



Caput mediocre.

ARISTOTELES commendat Alexandro Magno caput mediocre, & intra mensum constitutum, cum Polemon, & Adamantius medie magnitudinis caput laudent. Id videtur Leoni comparandum, ipse enim ad corporis rationem, moderata capitis magnitudine est: ut apud Aristotelem videre est, leonis formam describentem. Albertus ad hac. Moderatum caput indicat ingenium, & sensum, aliquando tamen timidum, & liberalem, sed ego non timidum, sed audacem, & magnanimum ad leonem relatum.

Prima hac tabella in dextra sui parte non naturalem capitis formam refert, in qua anterior eminentia perit, posterior sumet sinistra vero secundum capitis innaturalem formam, in qua postica pars deperditur; anterior gibba.

FIGURE 6 Illustration from Giambattista della Porta

Reflection

THE TRINITY AND THE HUMAN

Richard Cross



According to the Catholic Christianity widely accepted in the medieval West, a divine person—the second person of the Trinity—became incarnate as the human being Jesus Christ, while nevertheless not ceasing to be divine. This change was generally analyzed in terms of the divine person's gaining in additional nature—a human nature—over and above his divine nature. In medieval philosophy, natures were typically construed as particulars, not universals, so the Incarnation was in consequence understood as fundamentally consisting in some kind of relationship between the divine person and a particular human nature.

As thus set out, the position raises two immediate questions. First, what kind of relationship between person and nature might be sufficient to secure the divine person's being a human being? Second, what might distinguish a person from a particular human nature, given that the requirements of Catholic orthodoxy preclude the possibility that Christ might be composed of two persons? But it does not take much intellectual effort to think of other more remotely related issues too. For example, third, what kind of human nature might be appropriate for such a privilege? Could nonhuman natures be likewise suitable? Could there be multiple incarnations,

or even one incarnation of multiple divine persons? All of these issues received detailed treatment by the medieval theologians. In what follows I will briefly examine some of the answers to the first four of these questions, taking each one in turn.

Historically speaking, two medieval solutions came to dominate the scene, and continued to do so all the way to the end of seventeenth century and beyond in both Catholic and Protestant circles: the accounts of the Dominican Thomas Aquinas and the Franciscan John Duns Scotus. Aquinas's account presupposes his views on the relationship between essence and existence, according to which a thing's existence, construed as in some sense a constituent of the thing, is responsible both for particularizing the thing's essence and for explaining the thing's substantial unity. In the case of Christ's human nature, the divine existence performs this dual explanatory function, and thereby ensures that the human nature is united to the divine person in the required way. Just as the union of individual essence and existence in Socrates in some sense explains his being an actual human being, so the union of human essence and divine existence in Jesus Christ explains the divine person's being an actual human being.¹

Aquinas's view presupposes that a created essence could be appropriately united to an uncreated existence in just the way that it is united to its own created existence in standard cases: that is to say, by being such that both the essence and the existence are *internal* to the whole individual substance they compose. Scotus rejects this, and posits instead the view that Christ's particular human nature is ontologically dependent on the divine person in the way that an accident is ontologically dependent on a subject.²

1 On this, see Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* III, q. 2, a. 6 ad 2, and III, q. 17, a. 2. For Aquinas's Christology, see Michael Gorman, *Aquinas on the Metaphysics of the Hypostatic Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

2 See Scotus, *Ordinatio* III, d. 1, p. 1, q. 1, nn. 14–16 (*Opera omnia*, ed. C. Balić et al., 21 vols. (Vatican City: Vatican Polyglot Press, 1950–2014), IX, 5–7). For Scotus's Christology, see my

Just as Socrates's dependent whiteness explains his being white, so the divine person's dependent humanity explains his being human.

Given Aquinas's views on the nature of the union between the divine person and the human nature, it seems to follow that what distinguishes a human person from a mere human nature is the possession of proper existence: Socrates is a person since he possesses existence proper to himself; Christ's human nature is not a person, since it fails to possess such existence, and has instead the existence that is proper to the divine person. Aquinas does not discuss the issue explicitly, as far as I know. But Scotus does. He reasons that personhood (*personalitas*), the thing that distinguishes persons from mere natures, cannot be something positive (such as existence), since if it were there would be something created that could not be assumed by a divine person (namely, personhood), and thus something human that could not be redeemed (given that in Catholic theology one of the purposes of divine incarnation is redemption). Scotus argues instead that personhood must consist fundamentally in a negation: the failure to be assumed by a divine person. In addition, he supposes that such a negation is natural to a human nature—it is the default position, so to speak—and thus that personhood in addition requires an inclination against being assumed. But anything human can be assumed by a divine person: so personhood cannot include a *de re* bar to being assumed. As Scotus puts it, “I call possible [dependence] that in which there is no impossibility from the repugnance or impossibility of the terms. . . . And [this] negation cannot be posited in a created nature in relation to the Word [i.e. the second person of the Trinity], since there is no nature or created entity for which it is contradictorily repugnant to depend on the Word.”³ The inclination against

The Metaphysics of the Incarnation: Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

3 Scotus, *Ordinatio* III, d. 1, p. 1, q. 1, nn. 45–46 (Vatican ed., IX, 20).

being assumed, unlike actual nonassumption, survives the process of assumption, and is thus exhibited as much by Christ's human nature as by any other.

The conclusion here—that “there is no nature or created entity for which it is contradictorily repugnant to depend on the Word”—perhaps suggests that for Scotus there are no restrictions on the kind of human nature that could be assumed by the divine person. And this, indeed, is more or less what he thinks. In particular, he does not believe that there are particular activities or actions that an assumed nature need engage in. Many of his contemporaries and predecessors thought that assumption entailed perfect human knowledge and a perfect human will, since they believed that it entailed the enjoyment of the vision of the divine essence and the impeccability that that enjoyment was supposed to confer. The standard reason was that the perfection of a substance (such as its being assumed by the divine person) entails the perfection of its powers; and that the perfection of its powers—intellect and will in the case of a human being—entails perfect occurrent cognition and volition. Scotus agrees that *de facto* Christ's human nature did enjoy these various perfections.⁴ But he holds that there are relations of “natural priority” between substance, power, and activity, such that the perfection of a substance as such is antecedent to the perfection of its powers.⁵ So a nature could be perfected—by assumption—quite independently of any perfection accruing to the nature's powers. (This does not commit Scotus to the view that the perfection of a substance's powers is not *eo ipso* a perfection of the substance; all that is at stake is the rejection of an argument from an inert perfection, so to speak, to a causal one.)

4 For a useful discussion, see Marilyn McCord Adams, *What Sort of Human Nature? Medieval Philosophy and the Systematics of Christology*, The Aquinas Lecture, 1999 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1999).

5 For a discussion of this argument, see pp. 115–17 in my “Incarnation, Indwelling, and the Vision of God: Henry of Ghent and Some Franciscans,” *Franciscan Studies* 57 (1999): 79–130.

Scotus does not discuss whether there is some kind of human activity *incompatible* with being a divine incarnation. At least one of his contemporaries denied that there was any such activity. According to Robert Kilwardby (c. 1215–79), a noted logician who was a theologian at Paris and later archbishop of Canterbury in his native England, it would be possible for a divine person to assume a sinful nature. Kilwardby reasons that the Incarnation allows us to ascribe, with *qua*-modifiers, human properties to the divine person even in the case that the unmodified ascription of the property to the person would result in a contradiction. So ascribing sinfulness to the divine person is no worse than ascribing passibility, for example, given that the divine person is supposed to be as much impassible as sinless.⁶

Aquinas does not discuss any of these cases. He is silent, too, on a further issue: whether or not nonhuman natures could be assumed. The stock examples were the possibility of the second person of the Trinity becoming a donkey, or becoming a stone.⁷ The question is not trivial (perhaps despite appearances), because it allowed philosophers to focus on precisely what it is for something to subsist (or not). Thus, Scotus's account of personhood as independence can be generalized to include subsistence as such. According to Scotus, "the negation . . . of aptitudinal dependence completes the notion of person in an intellectual nature and of *suppositum* in a created nature."⁸ (A *suppositum* is an independent substance.) This move sharply distinguishes notions of independence (and its close relation, incommunicability), associated with the things that are *supposita*, from those of rational self-determination, associated with those *supposita* that are persons (a notion that is first defined in Boethius's theological

6 See my "Incarnation, Indwelling," 85–86. For another case, see "Incarnation, Indwelling," 125–29.

7 On this, see my "Incarnation, Indwelling," 82–84.

8 Scotus, *Ordinatio* III, d. 1, p. 1, q. 1, n. 46 (Vatican, IX, 20–21).

treatises, according to which “a person is an individual substance of rational nature”).⁹ Indeed, it is a curious irony in the history of the period that this sharp dissociation should occur precisely contemporaneously with the development of the notion of self-reflexivity as a defining feature of properly human subsistence or personhood. As Theo Kobusch has shown, this innovation can be ascribed to Scotus’s immediate Franciscan predecessor, Peter Olivi, who defined “person” as “self-reflexive existence.”¹⁰ The account of the Incarnation just offered shows that none of this is connected, historically, with the theological and philosophical notions of subsistence and ontological independence.

⁹ Boethius, *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium*, chap. 4 (Boethius, *De consolatione philosophiae. Opuscula theologica*, ed. C. Moreschini, Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana (Leipzig: K. G. Saur, 2000), 219, 271–72).

¹⁰ Peter Olivi, *In sent. Quaestiones in secundum librum Sententiarum*, ed. B. Jansen, 3 vols., Bibliotheca Franciscana scholastica medii aevi, 4–6 (Quaracchi: Collegium Sancti Bonaventurae, 1922–6) II, q. 5, discussed in Theo Kobusch, “Person—die verkörperte Selbstreflexivität: Grundstrukturen der Personenlehre des Petrus Johannis Olivi,” in *Selbstbewusstsein und Person im Mittelalter*, ed. G. Mensching (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2005), 67–79 (p. 68). On the development of the moral and juridical aspects of personhood, see more generally Theo Kobusch, *Die Entdeckung der Person: Metaphysik der Freiheit und modernes Menschenbild* (Freiburg: Herder, 1993).

Renaissance Conceptions of Human Being

Amos Edelheit

Is there anything particularly new in the Renaissance conceptions of a human being? This question requires a short account of the rather schematic distinction between the “Middle Ages” and the “Renaissance.” First, a short statement and some implications may be in order.

Both medieval and Renaissance philosophies are still associated, in many discussions, with the Aristotelian tradition.¹ We know how important the Aristotelian framework was in the Latin West, but I suggest that this scholarly focus on “Renaissance Aristotelianism(s)” has served mainly as a shortcut, or worse, as an excuse,² to avoid dealing with the real philosophical system which became dominant at least

¹ On Aristotle, also see Deslauriers and Filotas, chapter 2 here.

² The phrase “Renaissance Aristotelianism(s),” in the plural, reflecting the variety and complexity among Aristotelian philosophers of the Renaissance, is one of the important insights of Charles Schmitt. See his *Aristotle and the Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 10–33.

from the foundation of the universities and the houses of learning of the Mendicant Orders: the scholastic method, or rather methods, or, simply, scholasticism: the philosophy formed by the “men of the schools.” The emergence of the *homo scholasticus* roughly between the thirteenth and the seventeenth centuries is one of the most significant, yet relatively neglected, phenomena in the intellectual history of early-modern Europe. Scholasticism, despite its unjustified reputation (which is the result of some very effective rhetoric, first by Renaissance humanists from Petrarch to Erasmus and beyond—one has only to mention *Epistolae obscurorum virorum*—and then by the “new philosophers” from Descartes to Hume and beyond, and is still accepted in an uncritical and unscholarly fashion by many intellectual historians and in standard accounts of the history of early-modern philosophy), was never a monolithic, stagnant, philosophical and theological discourse. It changed and developed significantly over time, responding to different intellectual challenges. Medieval scholasticism, for instance, is different from Renaissance scholasticism.³ Why, then, is it such an important phenomenon? The coexistence of Renaissance scholastics and Renaissance humanists in a Renaissance setting, and the formation of these two distinct discourses, which, beyond obvious differences and disagreements, also share some methods and practices over a significant period of time, resulted, I would contend, in the formation of the early-modern and modern philosophical and scientific discourse of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, some of which has survived into our current philosophical canon.

When did the Renaissance really start, and under which circumstances? Should it be associated with early-modern developments pointing toward modernity, secularization, and progress or rather with the later stage of the Middle Ages? John Monfasani has made a strong

3 For one example see Amos Edelheit, “From Logic to Ethics and from Natural Philosophy to Mathematics: Nicoletto Vernia and the Division of Philosophy—Continuation and Innovation,” in *For a Skeptical Peripatetic: Festschrift in Honour of John Glucker*, eds. Yosef Z. Liebersohn, Ivor Ludlam, and Amos Edelheit (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2017), 308–28.

case for the latter, aiming at avoiding unnecessary efforts to “modernize” the Renaissance at all costs, while Ronald Witt has brought the starting-point of Renaissance humanism down to the mid-thirteenth century, associating this new intellectual fashion with an increasing interest in ancient Roman poetry, which was read and imitated by lawyers and notaries in the Veneto area two generations before Petrarch.⁴ So now we have a more complex and nuanced picture of the Renaissance, and we can finally address the question: Is there anything particularly new in the Renaissance conceptions of a human being? In what follows I shall present and examine several case studies of such conceptions.

The Franciscan Scotist philosopher Antonio Trombetta (1436–1517), who “publicly” taught metaphysics *in via Scoti* (that is, after the manner of Duns Scotus) at the University of Padua from 1477 provides, in question 4 of his *Quaestiones metaphysicales* (1493), an interesting, but by no means unusual, account of the concept of a human being, which he uses in this context as an example illustrating the difference between physics and metaphysics:

for it is one thing to consider humanity inasmuch as it is quiddity which includes sensible matter, or matter as potential and mobile principle, having an inclination toward natural form as its subject; and similarly to consider the form of humanity as the principle of operation and movement in itself. It is another thing to consider humanity as some entity in itself, and as [a thing which] includes matter and form, and these are the principles of its essence, restricted

4 John Monfasani, “The Renaissance as the Concluding Phase of the Middle Ages,” *Bullettino dell’Istituto Storico Italiano Per Il Medio Evo* 108 (2006): 165–85; Ronald G. Witt, “In the Footsteps of the Ancients”: *The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); *The Two Latin Cultures and the Foundation of Renaissance Humanism in Medieval Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). But see the review article of the second of these books by Alexander Murray, “Out of Limbo: Devotion, Erudition and an Anticlerical Strain in a Remarkable Study of the ‘All-Conquering Classical Enthusiasm’ That Nourished the Renaissance,” *Times Literary Supplement*, January 11, 2013, 3–4, for some limitations in Witt’s perspective concerning theological matters and the role of religion in the Renaissance.

by all sorts of movement and change. For just as “being,” which metaphysics considers, in the first place it abstracts it from movement and quantity, and from any sensible quality, so it abstracts anything inasmuch as it is considered by metaphysics, and so metaphysics considers material quiddity in its particular aspect [and] in its inclination toward being and toward principles of being.⁵

What we have here is a typical scholastic analysis of the term “humanity,” taken as the object of two different philosophical disciplines—indeed, two different perspectives: physics, or natural philosophy, and metaphysics. In the same question, as part of the dialectical discussion, we find yet another interesting account of “human being,” still in the context of metaphysics: this time humanity (*humanitas*) is identified with two essential qualities: having a soul (*animalitas*) and rationality (*rationalitas*).⁶ Around two hundred years earlier Thomas Aquinas presented, in his *Questions on the Soul*, an account of human being based on operation (*operatio*): what makes for a human being is the ability to understand (*intelligere*) and to use reason (*ratione uti*).⁷

In many respects Aristotle had set the scene for later discussions in the Latin West in general, and in the Renaissance in particular, concerning human nature. In the *Politics* A 1253a9–18 he declares that the

5 Antonio Trombetta, *Quaestiones metaphysicales*, in *Opus doctrinae scoticae Patavii in thomistas discussum* (Venice: Hieronymus de Paganinis, 1493), 17v: “Unde aliquod est considerare humanitatem inquantum quidditas includens materiam sensibilem seu materiam prout est principium potentiale et mobile, habens ordinem ad formam naturalem ut subiectum ipsius; et similiter considerare formam humanitatis prout est principium operationis et motus in ipsa. Aliud est considerare humanitatem ut quedam entitas in se, et ut includit [this is somewhat irregular, one would expect *includens* here] materiam et formam, et ista sunt principia essentie ipsius circumscripta omni ratione motus et mutationis. Unde sicut ens quod primo considerat metaphysica abstrahit a motu et quanto, et ab omni qualitate sensibili, sic et quodlibet inquantum consideratur a metaphysica, sic abstrahit et sic metaphysica considerat quidditatem materialem in particulari respectu in ordine ad ens et ad principia entis.”

6 “Humanitas est animalitas et rationalitas quia ista includuntur essentialiter in humanitate.”

7 Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones de anima*, ed. James H. Robb (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1968), 3 (titled: “utrum intellectus possibilis sive anima intellectiva sit una in omnibus”), p. 83: “propria autem operatio hominis, in eo quod est homo, est intelligere et ratione uti.”

human being is the only animal who has *logos*. While other animals produce sound (φωνή) while in pain or pleasure, *logos* is something entirely different. It indicates what is useful and harmful, as well as what is just and unjust. What is unique to human nature is a sense, or a feeling (αἴσθησις), of good and evil, just and unjust—in short, what we would call a moral sentiment.⁸ This is the meaning of *logos* for Aristotle at this stage. Knowledge or reason are of course out of the equation in this context. Aristotle's notion of *logos* as a moral sentiment is closer to being an instinct than a rational reflection, and this instinct is unique to human nature. One notes that the medieval Arab philosophers, while the *Politics* was unknown to them, seem to have learned the standard definition of human being as ζῶον λόγον ἔχον (“an animal which has *logos*,” Arabic *hayawan mutakallim*, “an animal which talks”) from the logical writings of Aristotle and his Greek commentators, which were widely read in Arabic and later in Latin translations.⁹ The meaning of *logos* in a logical context is quite different from its meaning in the *Politics*.

But at 1253a31–33, Aristotle adds that the human being, when fulfilling his purpose (in this context, living in a *polis*, the natural human situation) is the best (βέλτιστος) of all animals, and while living without law and justice, becomes the worst (χείριστος).¹⁰ I shall come back to this observation in my discussion of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.

But who read the *Politics*? This text was certainly not one of the most popular texts of Aristotle during antiquity and the Middle Ages, possibly because it was overshadowed by Plato's *Republic* and *Laws* and their reputation during the period of the Platonic schools in late antiquity.¹¹ The first commentary on the *Politics* was written by Michael Ephesius in the twelfth century, and only a few pages of notes from

8 Aristotle, *Politics*, A 1253a9–18.

9 On Arabic medieval philosophy, also see López-Farjeat, chapter 4 here.

10 Aristotle, *Politics*, A 1253a31–33.

11 On Plato, also see Kamtekar, chapter 1 here.

it survived. This lack of popularity is also reflected in the scarcity of manuscripts of the *Politics*; most of them were written after the Fall of Constantinople, and all are dependent on one archetype of the sixth or seventh century. Proclus seems to have been the last author in antiquity who was familiar with this text.¹²

It was William Moerbeke who, around 1260, translated the *Politics* for the first time into Latin. This translation was sharply criticized by one of the leading Renaissance humanists of the first half of the fifteenth century, Leonardo Bruni (1370–1444).¹³ Bruni not only read this work in Greek but also translated it in 1438 into humanist Latin. A comparison between Moerbeke's and Bruni's translations of the *Politics* might shed some light on one or two important Renaissance conceptions of human being. Moerbeke translates the phrase *κοινωνία πολιτική* (1252aff) as *communicatio politica*, following Jerome's New Testament translation for the first term and leaving the second term in a rather obscure transliteration. Bruni translates the phrase as *civilis societas*, following Cicero and Roman law, and reflecting the political atmosphere, rhetoric, and practices of the Florentine republic in the fifteenth century.¹⁴ Bruni's rendering introduces a new sense of history (Aristotle as part of the ancient "classical" civilization, just like Cicero and unlike the later "medieval" period) and thus a new sense of human being as part of history and of historical periods, and a new sense of

12. See John Glucker, "The Fate of Aristotle's *Politics* in Antiquity and the Middle Ages," in *Aristotelian Political Philosophy*, vol. 2, ed. K. J. Boudouris (Athens: Center for Greek Philosophy and Culture, 1995), 75–79.

13. Some of Bruni's most critical statements against the "medieval translator" can be found in his *On the Right Translation*: Leonardo Bruni, *De interpretatione recta*, in *Opere letterarie e politiche di Leonardo Bruni*, ed. Paolo Viti (Turin: Unione tipografico-editrice torinese, 1996), 150 and 152. For an assessment of Bruni as a translator, including an account regarding Aristotle's "sweet style" (Bruni following Cicero), see Paul Botley, *Latin Translation in the Renaissance: The Theory and Practice of Leonardo Bruni, Giannozzo Manetti and Desiderius Erasmus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 5–62; especially 42–54.

14. See James Schmidt, "A Raven with a Halo: The Translation of Aristotle's *Politics*," *History of Political Thought* 7, no. 2 (1986): 295–319.

civil society as an essential part of human nature. The phrase *civilis societas* had an enormous impact on the political philosophy of the next three centuries and beyond.

Marsilio Ficino's (1433–1499) *On Christian Religion* (*De Christiana religione*) is a remarkable work; but what concerns us here is that it is here that we find a clear account of the essential bond between human nature and religion. This text, written in 1473–1474 and published two years later, was composed and published in both Latin and the vernacular and is one of the most fundamental documents of Renaissance spiritual and religious life.¹⁵

In the very first lines of the first chapter, Ficino states that religion is what gives preeminence to humankind in nature, and this striving upward toward God the King of Heaven (regarded as the motive force of every religion) is as natural to humankind as neighing or barking are to horses or dogs.¹⁶ Here Ficino is discussing natural, prerevealed religion, the consequence of human being's natural upward drive, *erectio* or *elevatio*. *Erectio* may look like a translation of the Neoplatonic term ἀναφορά;¹⁷ but, despite the similarity in the expression “God the king,” ἀναφορά is the action of the metaphysician referring everything back to God, while *erectio* is an action of the soul raising itself toward God, just

15 Marsilio Ficino, *De Christiana religione*, in *Opera*, 2 vols. (Basel 1576; reprint, Paris: Ivry sur Seine: Phénix, 2008), vol. 1, 1–77. The first Latin edition was published in Florence between November 10 and December 10, 1476; the first Italian edition was published in Florence probably before March 25, 1475. See Cesare Vasoli, *Quasi sit deus—studi su Marsilio Ficino* (Lecce: Conte, 1999), 120.

16 Ficino, *De Christiana religione*, 2. Ficino's critique of previous answers to the question of the preeminence in nature of mankind, as well as his own solution, is discussed also in book 14, chapter 9, of his *Platonic Theology*. See Ficino, *Theologia platonica de immortalitate animorum*, 6 vols., ed. James Hankins with William Bowen, trans. Michael J. B. Allen with John Warden (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001–6), vol. 4, pp. 290–98; especially pp. 292–96. See also James Hankins, “Religion and the Modernity of Renaissance Humanism,” in *Interpretations of Renaissance Humanism*, ed. Angelo Mazzocco (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 137–53; especially 147–48.

17 See, e.g., Georgius Gemistus Plethon, *De differentiis*, in B. Lagarde, “Le ‘De differentiis’ de Pléthon d’après l’autographe de la Marcienne,” *Byzantion* 43 (1973): 312–43, at 342.

as the human body stands erect, facing upward to heaven.¹⁸ Religion therefore occupies a central place in human life:

man, the most perfect animal, by this quality [religion] especially is both owner of perfection and different from inferior things by the same quality through which he is connected to the most perfect things, i.e., divine ones. And conversely, if man, as man, is the most perfect among mortal animals, it is chiefly because of this quality that he is the most perfect [animal] of all; which he himself possesses as his special [quality] which is not common to the rest of them. This [quality] is religion; therefore, it is on account of religion [that man] is most perfect.¹⁹

Religion here is a natural and unique quality of human beings, which makes us the most perfect animals. But what if anything went wrong with this quality? "If religion were to be empty, man would, in turn, on account of it, be the most imperfect of all [animals], since, on account of it, man would be the most foolish and miserable [animal]."²⁰ How can religion be empty? This may mean that "religion" refers here only to the external constituents: empty rituals which have become routine. But a comparison with the opening lines of the first chapter of *Theologia platonica*, *Si animus non esset immortalis, nullum animal esset infelicius homine*, may provide another answer: "if, therefore, religion

18 *Erectio* in this sense is not scriptural. See references to classical, patristic, and medieval sources in *Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Charles B. Schmitt, Quentin Skinner, Eckhard Kessler, and Jill Kraye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 311, note 55.

19 Ficino, *De Christiana religione*, 2: "Homo perfectissimum animal, ea proprietate maxime tum perfectione pollet, tum ab inferioribus discrepat, qua perfectissimis, id est, divinis coniungitur. Rursus, si homo animalium mortalium perfectissimus est, in quantum homo, ob eam praecipue dotem est omnium perfectissimus, quam inter haec habet ipse propriam, caeteris animalibus non communem, ea religio est, per religionem igitur est perfectissimus." We can find the idea regarding the unique place of the human soul and human beings in nature with regard to their relations with the gods in, e.g., Xenophon, *Memorabilia* I, 4, 13. See also the same idea with regard to cities, nations, and ages in I, 4, 16.

20 Ibid.: "Si religio esset inanis, per eam rursus homo omnium esset imperfectissimus, quoniam per eam dementissimus esset, atque miserrimus."

(as we said) is empty, there is no animal more foolish and miserable than man; and so, because of religion, man would be the most imperfect of all, and yet by virtue of it, he has just a little earlier seemed to be more perfect than all [animals].”²¹ And: “since humankind, because of the restlessness of our soul and the weakness of our body and our need for all things, lives on earth a harder life than beasts; if exactly the same end of life were attributed to man as to the rest of the animals, there would be no animal more miserable than him.” It appears that the emptiness of religion in these passages means the lack of hope of eternal life. This would render religion itself meaningless. What, then, is Ficino’s solution in the *Theologia platonica* to the miserable *conditio humana* on earth? Since only after the body’s death can the human being become blessed, it is necessary that some light should be left to human beings when they depart from this earthly prison.²²

By means of this comparison we can see why *religio* in *De Christiana religione* is the counterpart of the immortality of the soul (*immortalitas animi*) in *Theologia platonica* (full title: *Theologia platonica de immortalitate animorum*). Lacking either *religio* or *immortalitas animi*, human beings become the most miserable creatures on earth. The aim of religion is thus for Ficino the immortality of the soul. This idea is also at the center of his favorite philosophical school: the Neoplatonic tradition: see, for example, the very last chapter of Plotinus’s last *Ennead*. This tradition, which Ficino used for constructing much of

21 Ibid.: “Si ergo religio, (ut diximus) vana est, nullum est animal dementius et infelicius homine, esset igitur ob religionem homo imperfectissimus omnium, per eam tamen paulo ante omnibus perfectior apparebat.”

22 Ficino, *Theologia platonica*, vol. 1, 14: “Cum genus humanum propter inquietudinem animi imbecillitatemque corporis et rerum omnium indigentiam duriorum quam bestiae vitam agat in terris, si terminum vivendi natura illi eundem penitus atque ceteris animantibus tribuisset, nullum animal esset infelicius homine.” Compare this expression to I Cor 15, 16–19. Paul emphasizes the importance of the idea of the resurrection of the dead. Ficino replaces it with the idea of the eternity of the soul, but he uses the same Pauline rhetoric. See also the remarks of Eugenio Garin in his “La ‘teologia’ ficiniana,” *Archivio di filosofia umanesimo e machiavellismo* (Padua, 1949), 1–12. Compare Ficino’s letter to Benedetto Colucci titled “Homo sine religione bestiis est infelicior,” in *Opera*, vol. 1, 647.

his *prisca theologia*, represents for him the wisdom mentioned earlier. But the same element of human nature cannot be a cause both of the most imperfect and the most perfect condition of humankind. Ficino therefore distinguishes between “vain religion” (*vana religio*) and “true religion” (*religio vera*), whose main object is God.²³

So far, the idea of religion being peculiar to human nature might be interpreted almost in the sense of natural religion. But Ficino would not allow us to make this mistake. Combining what appears to be the Stoic concept of *communis opinio* with the idea of God as the origin of such opinions, Ficino reminds us that even that distinct part of human nature was created by God. God is responsible for every species in nature, as well as for their different instincts. Ficino now returns to the human being: “also by the common religious feeling of people religion is true, since all [humankind] always and everywhere worship God for the sake of future life.” Here we may have the connecting link between religion as unique to human beings in *De Christiana religione* and life after death as unique to human beings in *Theologia platonica*. Since this true religion is natural to human beings, and was implanted in us by God, one can be sure of the religious truth of a future life: “it is thus true that God cares for us and that there will be another life, if indeed the most perfect species among animals holds this most true judgment which is most natural to him among all [animals].”²⁴ This natural belief not only seems to be implanted in every single human being but also to be an unchangeable and common element, as against all the changeable opinions, affections, manners, and laws of human beings.²⁵ Ficino does not use logical arguments and syllogisms as one would find in a scholastic discussion of such a theme. He prefers commonly held opinion or religious feelings, a historical fact, as the starting-point for

²³ Ficino, *De Christiana religione*, 2.

²⁴ Ficino, *De Christiana religione*, 2: “Verum est igitur providere nobis Deum, et vitam aliam fore, si modo perfectissima species animalium verissimum habet iudicium illud, quod sibi est maxime omnium naturale.”

²⁵ Ficino, *De Christiana religione*, 2.

his discussion, and the only inference we find here is that even such a historical fact should be ascribed to God's first act of intervention in history, the creation of human nature. Ficino concludes this chapter with his own variation on a remote echo of an Aristotelian motif: "if therefore someone is found to be completely without religion, since this is contrary to the nature of mankind, either he is some sort of monster from birth, or he was defiled by the contagion of another monster."²⁶ Another representative of Renaissance thought is the Franciscan philosopher and theologian Giorgio Benigno Salviati (c. 1448–1520). In his discussion of the importance of the will in the human soul we find yet another attempt at determining human nature.²⁷ For Salviati it is the faculty of the will which makes us human.

In chapter 12 of his *Fridericus*, Salviati states that the will is what gives preeminence in nature to human beings. The will is contrasted to nature, to the senses, and to the intellect; it is a dominant, active, and ruling element which is free. The intellect on the other hand is not peculiar to human beings:

since every living being understands, and understanding, in turn, is the genus of reason and sense-perception; therefore, the intellect falls [i.e., as a species] under the same genus as the sense; since all these are defined as "apprehensive powers" and they are all natural principles. But only the will differs from them as to their common

²⁶ Ficino, *De Christiana religione*, 2: "Siquis ergo reperiatur omnis religionis penitus expers, quia praeter humanae speciei naturam est, vel monstrum quoddam est ab initio, vel contagione monstri alterius inquinatus." See Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a1–4. This was later interpreted and supplemented: the man without a *polis* is either a god or a beast. Ficino turns Aristotle's man without a *polis* into a man without religion.

²⁷ Ficino, *De Christiana religione*, 2. This early discussion, written in dialogue form during Salviati's stay in Urbino some time between 1474 and 1482, and titled *Fridericus, On the Prince of the Soul's Kingship*, can be found in P. Zvonimir Cornelius Šojat O.F.M., *De voluntate hominis eiusque praeminentia et dominatione in anima secundum Georgium Dragisic* (c. 1448–1520), *studium historico-docrinale et editio Tractatus: "Fridericus, De animae regni principe"* (Rome: 1972), 139–219; for a biographical sketch and a list of Salviati's works see 27–63; a doctrinal study of the dialogue: 69–128. For a more detailed biographical sketch and an intellectual profile, see Vasoli, *Profezia e ragione. Studi sulla cultura del Cinquecento e del Seicento* (Naples: Morano, 1974), 17–127.

genus, and only the will is separated from, and opposed to them, and is called active by its own intention, that is, free. . . . But only the will is by itself free, reason is no more than vision; and thus man, while acting through his intellect, just like acting through his sense, is acting according to nature. Only by his will, as being a free agent, is man chiefly distinguished from beasts. But the more man is distinct from beasts, the more he is a man; therefore, this thing will be more noble, through which he is most removed from the baser things. And thus the will, since it appears to be man at his most human, should be regarded as the most excellent element in man.²⁸

Salviati is making here his own contribution to fifteenth-century discussions of the dignity of man, a theme usually related to the humanist movement.²⁹ He thus rejects the idea formulated in Aristotle's *Politics*

28 Salviati, *Fridericus*, 173: "Omne enim animal cognoscit, cognitio quoque genus est ad rationis sensusque notitiam; intellectus igitur cum sensu sub eodem genere cadit. Vocantur enim omnes 'potentiae apprehensivae,' suntque cunctae naturales causae. At sola voluntas ab eis quovis eis communi genere differt, solaque e contra dividitur, vocaturque agens a proposito sive liberum"; "sola vero voluntas ex se libera est, ratio non magis quam visus; homo itaque per intellectum agit natura, sicut et per sensum. Sola voluntate, tamquam libero agente, a beluis potissime distat; quo vero magis distat, eo magis est homo; magis igitur id erit nobile, quo maxime a vilioribus removetur. Voluntas itaque cum maxime homo videatur, 'praestabilissimum quid' in homine sit fatendum est." On this see also Vasoli, *Profezia e ragione*, 36.

29 Dealing with a historical figure like Salviati, one cannot use too strict or schematic definitions of humanism or scholasticism. For one such too strict and very influential approach to the humanist movement, see Witt, "The Humanism of Paul Oskar Kristeller," in *Kristeller Reconsidered: Essays on His Life and Scholarship*, ed. J. Monfasani (New York: Italica Press, 2006), 257–67; see especially 258–59. We need a more flexible and dynamic notion, in which also the Franciscan friar who was so active in the intellectual and religious life in Rome and Florence, and had close relations with prominent figures of the time in both Cardinal Bessarion's circle (Fernando di Córdoba, Giovanni Gatti, cardinal and the future pope Francesco della Rovere, and Salviati's teacher John Foxoles) and in Lorenzo de' Medici's circle (Ficino and Pico among many other humanists and scholastics), could be adequately studied. Though he was "only" a theologian and a philosopher who studied in Paris and Oxford, and not strictly a philologist, his social and intellectual involvement placed him inside the humanist milieu. It is enough to mention his defense not only of Pico or Reuchlin but also of Savonarola to show the historical complexity we have to deal with. My point is not that we should turn Salviati into a humanist but that we should use more sensitive historical terms through which we could follow him through the different historical contexts in which he was active.

(1253a9–10) concerning human beings and *logos* (see n. 10 earlier) which became so central among the later ancient and medieval Greek, Latin, and Arab interpreters, and was so dominant in many contexts of scholastic philosophy. He also rejects Augustine's notion of *ratio-nalis anima* as what gives preeminence in nature to human beings.³⁰ Salviati's solution is quite different from that of Ficino, who regards religion as most characteristic of human beings, and is somewhat closer to the solution of Pico, who says in the opening lines of his oration of 1486, later titled *On the Dignity of Man*, that the human being has received from God the possibility to choose his own fate and way of life.³¹ Already at this stage we can say that Salviati presents a fuller account than Pico's, based on the notions of human will and freedom as developed in scholastic philosophy up to his own day. On the other hand his method is to reconcile different and sometimes opposed opinions, showing their concord—in this case in a similar way to both Ficino

30 Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* I, XXII, 20: "Magna enim quaedam res est homo, *factus ad imaginem et similitudinem Dei*, non in quantum mortali corpore includitur, sed in quantum beatitatis rationalis animae honore praecedit."

31 For Pico's notion see Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Discorso sulla dignità dell'uomo*, ed. Francesco Bausi (Parma: Fondazione P. Bembo, Ugo Guanda, 2003; reprint, 2007); the relevant passage can be found on 6–10. It should be noted that Pico does not use *voluntas* or *libertas* here, which are central terms in Salviati's discussion, but only *arbitrium* and *arbitrarius*. On the other hand we may have an echo of a common biblical source for both Pico and Salviati, cited only by the Franciscan; see Salviati, *Fridericus*, 169–70: "atque hoc est id quod Eccli. 15 dicit: *Ab initio fecit Deus hominem et dimisit eum in manu consilii sui*, id est dimisit ei potestatem et libertatem sequi aut fugere consilium sive rationis arbitrium. Unde et subdit: *Apposui tibi aquam et ignem*, hoc est varias rationes contrariasque; *ad quod volueris, oppone manum tuam*, hoc est quam tibi placet, sponte sequaris sententiam." The biblical verses from Ecclesiasticus 15, 14–17, receive here an interpretation according to Salviati's own philosophical terminology. We find also in Pico the expression *in cuius manu te posui*. On the theme of human dignity (though with a different interpretation of both Ficino and Pico) see the general discussion in Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources*, ed. Michael Mooney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 169–81. It is symptomatic of Kristeller's approach that he mentions on p. 171 the facts that the earliest humanist treatment of the dignity of man by Bartolomeo Facio was encouraged by a Benedictine monk, Antonio da Barga, and that this subject is treated by him "in a strongly religious and theological context" but that he does not deal at all with the contributions of the scholastic philosophers to this theme in the fifteenth century. A more detailed discussion of this theme, with yet a different approach, in which the scholastic tradition is better appreciated, can be found in Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2 vols. (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970), vol. I, 179–321.

and Pico, as well as to other humanists.³² Salviati does not explicitly reject Aristotle, Augustine, or any other authority. He simply presents an interpretation in which he is already using his own notions of will and freedom.³³ This is of course the standard way, in scholastic philosophy, of presenting new ideas. If some thinker somehow manages to relate his new notion of the human will and freedom, say, to Aristotle, then this is how this new notion should be presented. But through the dramatic dynamic of the dialogue, Salviati managed also to preserve the sense of novelty of his new theory.

Salviati, then, emphasizes the essential relation between *voluntas* and *libertas*, as against *natura* and *ratio*, which are not free. But he does not neglect the importance of reason or of rational proceedings. He prefers a broader definition of the rational soul, presented as an interpretation of Aristotle's notion of *anima rationalis*, which includes his new conception of the will, and which could have helped him also in reconciling his own ideas with Augustine's: "but Aristotle uses [the terms] rational or intellectual power in discussing the whole part of the soul, that which is described as 'rational.' Indeed, only the rational soul is free, yet not by dint of its reason, but by dint of its will. Hence he often uses [the expression] 'free agent' or 'intentional' in the same sense. But intention is firm volition of something."³⁴ Here we have another kind of rationality, stemming from a wider conception of the rational soul,

32 For Salviati's method see *Fridericus*, 157: "At veritati (id nostri) veritas—veluti nec bono bonum—opponitur numquam." See also the citations in Šojat's introduction, *Fridericus*, 35, n. 56, from Salviati's *Opus de natura caelestium spirituum quos angelos vocamus*, and from his *Propheticæ solutiones pro Hieronymo Savonarola*. See also Šojat's remarks on 65. On this same issue see also Vasoli's remarks in his *Profezia e ragione*, e.g., 34, 41–42. This method is very close to Pico's method in his famous *Conclusiones* of 1486. See Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Conclusiones nongentæ. Le novecento Tesi dell'anno 1486*, ed. Albano Biondi (Città di Castello: Olschki, 1995), 62: "Conclusiones paradoxæ numero XVII, secundum propriam opinionem, dicta primum Aristotelis et Platonis, deinde aliorum doctorum conciliantes, qui maxime discordare videntur."

33 See, e.g., *Fridericus*, 174.

34 *Fridericus*, 165–166: "Aristoteles autem rationalem potentiam sive intellectivam pro tota illa anima quæ 'rationalis' dicitur capit. Anima vero rationalis sola libera est, non tamen ratione, sed voluntate. Unde agens liberum sive a proposito pro eodem saepenumero accipit. Propositum autem est firma alicuius rei volitio."

which is free and contains both reason and will. Now we are ready for Salvati's account of *ratio, voluntas, libertas, and arbitrium*.

According to Salvati, reason, as well as all senses and powers of the human soul which participate in reason, can be described as free only through participation (*per participationem*) in voluntary actions, whereas the will is the only power which is by itself (*ex sese*) free.³⁵ Freedom here is reason's mastery, or the ability to control or perform its own acts. Only the will is the ruler of this kingdom in our soul; all other powers should be regarded only as handmaids or followers of this ruler.³⁶ Salvati now presents an argument showing that there is no disagreement with Thomas here, since no one, including the Angelic Doctor himself, would ever ask whether reason can be compelled to act in this or that manner, but only whether the will can be thus compelled. Thus, compulsion is related by everyone to reason, while acting contingently (*contingenter*) is the way of the will. Without this distinction how can some Doctors discuss whether someone can necessarily will the supreme good? The assumption is always that freedom and the will are strongly related. Hence, if we have freedom in us, it consists in the will, and if someone declares that our will is not free, this goes against reason, experience, and our faith.³⁷ Note that Salvati first constitutes the relation between freedom and the will, defining each

35 *Fridericus*, 168: "Ratio quoque et omnes sensus viresque, rationis participes, liberi per participationem dici possunt, at sola voluntas ex sese ut talis sit oportet." This is a standard Scotist position: "Potentia libera per participationem, quae subest libertati voluntatis, non magis determinatur secundum actum suum circa minimum obiectum quam maximum, ut patet de visu, quod non magis determinatur ad videndum solem quam aliud visibile; igitur multo fortius voluntas, quae libera est per essentiam, non magis determinabitur ad volendum unum quam aliud." This citation from Scotus's first commentary on the Sentences (*Lectura prima*, d. 1 p. 2 q. 2, n. 99) is quoted and discussed in Guido Alliney, "La contingenza della fruizione beatifica nello sviluppo del pensiero di Duns Scoto," in *Via Scoti. Metodologica ad mentem Joannis Duns Scoti. Atti del Congresso Scotistico Internazionale, Roma 9–11 marzo 1993*, 2 vols., ed. Leonardo Sileo (Rome: PAA-Edizioni Antonianum, 1995), vol. 2, 633–60; see 636 and note 13 there.

36 *Fridericus*, 168.

37 *Fridericus*, 168. For the sources at the background of Salvati's argument here, such as Thomas Aquinas, as well as Henry of Ghent, Giles of Rome, and Peter John Olivi, see Šojat, *De voluntate hominis*, references and citations on 168–69.

of these elements in the human soul and distinguishing them from all other natural, and thus necessary, elements like reason and the senses. Only then does he discuss another related term: *arbitrium*.

The discussion of *arbitrium* begins with a question raised by Octavianus, one of the two interlocutors in the dialogue, who has tried, in the first chapters,³⁸ to persuade Fridericus, the second interlocutor, who represents Salviati's own views, that the intellect is the most noble power in the human soul. Consistent with his line of thought, though admitting that he must accept Fridericus's arguments, Octavianus says: "I am now forced to accept these [arguments]. But why do we sometimes say that we have free judgment, when to give judgment, just like to have an opinion or to judge, would be an act of reason?"³⁹ A good question, originating in the distinction between reason and will, as well as in the common use of *liberum arbitrium* as free will. Octavianus is willing to accept the phrase *voluntas libera*, but in the light of the previous arguments and distinctions the phrase *liberum arbitrium* now seems misleading. Here Fridericus/Salviati has recourse to the other kind of rationality I discussed earlier:

human judgment [*iudicium sive arbitrium*] is free both while preceding the will and while following it: for, while we have this determination by the intellect "this thing is indeed better, but that is worse," the will is still free to pursue what is worse, and also not to will what is better, or certainly to take an indifferent position. Whence Ovid presented Medea in book 6 of *Metamorphoses* as thus saying: "I see and approve the better things, / [but] I follow the worse things." Certainly a most excellent and true sentence! And for this reason is our judgment free, because, just as to know, so also to judge what is good does not make us good, but only accepting

³⁸ *Fridericus*, 144–56.

³⁹ *Fridericus*, 169: "Compellor his iam adhaerere. Sed cur dicimus interdum arbitrium nos habere liberum, cum arbitari, sicut et opinari aut iudicare, sit rationis actus?"

and willing it does. And so free judgment is the free election or acceptance of judgment.⁴⁰

Here we have abandoned the dichotomy rational/irrational through the new notions of freedom and will in the human soul, which presents a more complex picture of human psychology. But this complexity gives us a more realistic account of most human actions, and it bears also some important ethical and theological implications. The possibility of deliberately choosing to commit an evil deed or a sin provided by our free and postlapsarian will is exactly what gives us as human beings the possibility of becoming good and, as Christians, of being saved. Another implication is that in reality there are two kinds of judgments: one of the reason (*arbitrium rationis*) and one of the will (*arbitrium voluntatis*). This observation is not new. But human judgment, according to Salviati's arguments, derives only from the will and thus is free. Human beings have received this ability from God himself. When one considers Thomas's view of *arbitrium rationis* one sees a wholly different psychology, in which the Aristotelian notions of *homo rationalis* and *prudentia* are still strongly reflected.⁴¹ Thomas's declaration that "homo est dominus suorum actuum per arbitrium

40 *Fridericus*, 169: "Humanum iudicium sive arbitrium liberum est ut praecedit voluntatem et ut sequitur eandem: data enim ab intellectu sententia 'hoc quidem esse melius, id vero deterius,' voluntas libera est ad prosequendum deterius, atque ad non volendum melius, aut certo ad standum indifferenter. Unde Medeam illam VI [this reference is corrected by Šojat: it should be to book VII, 20–21] libro *Metamorphoseos* Ovidius introducit sic dicentem: 'Video meliora proboque, / deteriora sequor.' Praeclara certo veraque sententia! Liberum itaque est nostrum arbitrium, quia veluti scire ita et iudicare bonum non facit nos esse bonos, sed id acceptare et velle [Šojat provides here a reference to Scotus]. Liberum itaque arbitrium est libera iudicii electio sive acceptatio." For the *fortuna* of this example of Medea as a case of *akrasia* in the later tradition, starting with Lévefre d'Étapes, see Risto Saarinen, "Weakness of Will in Renaissance and Reformation," in *The Problem of Weakness of Will in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Tobias Hoffmann, Jörn Müller, and Matthias Perkams (Leuven: Editions Peeters, 2007), 329–51; especially 334–47, 350–51. But as I have shown here, we find the example of Medea already earlier than Lévefre d'Étapes.

41 See, e.g., Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 2a2ae, q. 47, a. 12: "sed quia quilibet homo, inquantum est rationis, participat aliquid de regimine secundum arbitrium rationis, intantum convenit ei prudentiam habere."

rationis" is totally opposed to Salviati's view.⁴² During the two hundred years between Thomas's death in 1274 and the activity of Salviati, a whole new psychology has emerged in scholastic philosophy, and this psychology is reflected in Salviati's discussion of the human will, written during the 1470s.

My last representative of Renaissance philosophy is Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494). His account of human nature, found in his *Oration on Human Dignity* (1486), is regarded by many students of the Renaissance as the manifesto of Renaissance humanism.

Many scholastic philosophers and theologians would agree with Pico's assessment that the purpose of moral knowledge or science (*moralis scientia*) is to help us restrain the impulses of our affections, and that the purpose of dialectics is to help us dispel the obscurity in our reasoning. Given the state of the two imperfect parts in our soul, affection (*affectus*) and reason (*ratio*), we can—through these philosophical disciplines—"purify" the soul. But the rhetorical context of this account is explaining the role of each of the three kinds of angels (Seraphim, Cherubim, Throni), and this account is part of the explanation of the role of the Cherubim, following Dionysius the Areopagite: purifying, illuminating, and perfecting.⁴³ Pico's statement that we emulate in our present life the cherubic life ("nos cherubicam in terris vitam aemulantes") is a reference to the opening section of the *Oration*, but it also reflects the crucial role of philosophy according to Pico. He uses the phrase "we should purify the soul" (*animam purgemus*) as an image, expressing the improvement of our moral behavior and intellectual abilities. Immediately next in the order of progression—and it should be clear by now that Pico is intentionally employing an admixture of theological images and standard philosophical distinctions, using the discourse of spiritual progression as an analogy for philosophical progression—comes the light of natural

42 Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 2a2ae, q. 158, a. 2.

43 Pico, *Discorso sulla dignità dell'uomo*, 28.

philosophy, with which we should imbue ourselves (*perfundamus*), and at last (*postremo*), the understanding of that part of philosophy which deals with divine matters, which we should perfect (*perficiamus*).⁴⁴ Interestingly the second stage, being imbued with the light of natural philosophy, is not entirely the same as being illuminated, and it shows that Pico is aware of the potential tension between theological and philosophical speculations.

It is important to notice again the crucial role of theology in this context: theology, just like philosophy, becomes an object of investigation for the historian and interpreter of philosophy as long as it is part of human progression and development. It is part of both a historical and a psychological reality, and thus an essential part of reality itself. In other words: if theological discourse (*verba*) has any meaning it must be connected to reality (*res*), so it should be part of any significant account of that reality. The fact that scholastic philosophy has so many complex relations with theological issues is yet another good reason not to disregard this philosophical tradition.

Friendship (*amicitia*) is regarded as the end and purpose of philosophy according to the Pythagoreans, and in the same way peace (*pax*), which was created by God, is announced by the angels to human beings with good will, so that when they ascend to heaven they will become angels.⁴⁵ This peace is “a state of mind” thanks to which our soul becomes God’s home (*ipsa Dei domus fiat*) and after which purification is possible through moral philosophy, dialectic, and again theology.⁴⁶ Beyond the poetic images and language which are only to be expected in a speech, we find here again Pico’s consistent effort to combine philosophical and theological concepts. What is the purpose of such an effort? It might just be to show that theology has also a history, and this is an important step beyond the Eusebian project of the *Praeparatio*

⁴⁴ Ibid., 28–30.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 42.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 42–44.

Evangelica, which is an ahistorical project. Since theology plays such a significant role in human experience, psychology, and development, it becomes a legitimate subject for interpretation. It thus embraces not only the Mosaic and the Christian mysteries but also the theology of the ancients (*priscorum quoque theologia*), which shows us the benefits and dignity of liberal arts. For—Pico asks—what other purpose did these progressions attended by the initiators in the secret rites of the Greeks have, if not purification? And this process begins with moral philosophy and dialectic, regarded as virtually purifying arts (*quasi februales artes*) in undertaking the mysteries. What else do we have here but the interpretation of most recondite nature through philosophy? And beyond that comes the Divine Vision—ἐποπτεία—the investigation of divine matters through the light of theology.⁴⁷

In such a context philosophy is indeed crucial, and it is with this notion of philosophy as an object of historical interpretation which is inclusive that Pico makes some critical remarks regarding the status and general reputation of philosophical activity in his own time. If human progression is dependent on philosophical disciplines, then the study of philosophy cannot be regarded any longer as a mere aristocratic occupation designed for a few wealthy princes, nor can it be held in contempt. This is why—Pico admits—he was not just inclined toward studying philosophy but felt compelled to it. This is also why he has had to respond to those who are accustomed to condemn the study of philosophy, those who are responsible for the misfortune in this age where philosophizing is regarded as an annoyance instead of being held up with honor and glory.⁴⁸ Pico rejects here a common view held also by some humanists who regard philosophy as one ingredient of a good general education and nothing more,⁴⁹ but he is

⁴⁷ Ibid., 48.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 68–70.

⁴⁹ We even find a more negative attitude; see e.g., Cicero, *De officiis*, 1, 19. See also Cicero, *Lucullus* 4–6; Tacitus, *Agricola* 4.

also rejecting the institutional position and the view, held by many scholastic philosophers and theologians, that regards philosophy only as a preparation for theology and for a possible career in one of the three distinguished faculties (law, medicine, and theology). In other words, Pico rejects here the notion that philosophical study is not an end in itself but an instrument for achieving something more precious. The image of merchandise (*mercatura*) and the argument that philosophy is not merchandise, which is clearly presented in Pico's famous response to Andrea Corneo, as well as in the *Oration*,⁵⁰ is thus a critique of a common view found in both scholastic and humanist circles.

Against this common view Pico introduces the concept of conscience (*conscientia*) as a kind of an interiority which he has been taught by philosophy and which is contrasted to external judgments. Through this interiority he has learnt to disregard his own reputation and focus instead on what he is saying or doing.⁵¹ This "philosophical conscience" is regarded here as an inner criterion for judging one's own words and actions. Pico is using here a traditional concept to defend himself against his critics in the papal commission.

Pico continues to "cross the lines" between the scholastic and the humanist discourses, in his defense of public debates on philosophical and theological matters: he regards the scholastic practice of a public debate as an essential part of philosophy and as related to Plato, Aristotle, and the very best philosophers in any era. The very best Doctors (*doctores excellentissimi*) perform those debates, just as the best ancient philosophers did.⁵² By doing this Pico creates a philosophical continuity between classical and scholastic philosophies, rejecting

50 For Pico's letter to Andrea Corneo dated October 15, 1486, see his *Opera omnia* (Basel 1557; reprint, Hildesheim: Olms, 1969), 376–79; e.g., 377. And see Pico's *Discorso sulla dignità dell'uomo*, 70. The same image is used by Poliziano in his critique of the scholastic conception of philosophy; see *Angelo Poliziano's Lamia: Text, Translation, and Introductory Studies*, ed. Christopher S. Celenza (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 228.

51 Pico, *Discorso sulla dignità dell'uomo*, 72. And see yet another mention of *conscientia* on 80.

52 *Ibid.*, 76.

any sharp distinction between these two traditions, and thus any exclusive approach which prioritizes the philosophical culture of classical antiquity over medieval philosophical culture. A historical awareness of the differences between these two periods does not necessitate a dismissal of an important common feature between them in matters of philosophical practices and philosophical education. The practice of philosophical debates, which Pico regards as the most honest contests (*honestissima certamina*), is more than necessary for the wisdom which should be obtained (*adipiscenda sapientia*).⁵³ All future philosophical culture will become sluggish and sleepy if these philosophical contests and battles are to be taken away from it.⁵⁴ Pico is advocating a vivid and meaningful philosophical discourse—one which really matters both to those who participate in it and to those who are only following it. The result of this philosophical practice is becoming more learned (*doctior*) and better instructed (*instructior*) for future debates.⁵⁵

Pico's inclusive approach to different philosophical traditions (mainly to the scholastic schools on the one hand and the ancient Greek schools on the other) is clearly expressed through a famous motto taken from Horace's first epistle: "I never led myself to swear by the words of any master." ("Nullius addictus iurare in verba magistri.")⁵⁶ Those who follow the doctrines of either one of the two most popular thinkers, Thomas and Scotus, are putting at risk their own doctrine since they are committed to a philosophical discussion of a rather limited number of questions and issues.

This inclusive principle is, according to Pico, an ancient practice: the ancient philosophers "read any kind of writings" ("omne scriptorum genus evolventes"), they did not leave any treatise unread, and this is true with regard to Aristotle, for instance, who was praised for this

⁵³ Ibid., 76–78.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 78.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 80.

⁵⁶ Horace, *Epist.* I.I. 13–15: "Ac ne forte roges, quo me duce, quo Lare tuter: / Nullius addictus iurare in verba magistri, / Quo me cumque rapit tempestas, deferor hospes."

practice by Plato. One cannot select the proper philosophical school for himself without first knowing well all the schools.⁵⁷ The diversity among the philosophical schools is a good thing, since it means that each has its own unique features which are not common to the rest of the schools.⁵⁸ Pico follows this practice through all of the philosophical tradition from antiquity to the fourteenth century, pointing out the special feature in every philosopher, and thus creating a continuity between ancient and medieval philosophers, pagan (*apud Graecos*), Christian (*a nostris*) and Muslim (*apud Arabes*).⁵⁹ Here is Pico's account of the scholastic philosophers: "and to begin now with our philosophers to whom at last philosophy had arrived: in John Duns Scotus [we find] something vigorous and meticulous; in Thomas Aquinas something solid and sustained; in Giles of Rome something neat and accurate; in Francis of Mayrone something subtle and acute; in Albert the Great something ancient, splendid, and great; in Henry of Ghent, so it seems to me, [we find] something which is always sublime and venerable."⁶⁰ These six masters (two Dominicans, two Franciscans, one Augustinian Hermit, and one secular master) represent the last period in the philosophical tradition which is closer to Pico from both chronological and cultural perspectives. The sense of tradition is clearly shown by the adverb *postremo*, "at last." But Pico does not follow here a chronological order, which would have begun with the teacher of Thomas Aquinas, Albert the Great (c. 1193/1206–1280), and ended with the successor of Scotus, Francis of Mayrone (c. 1280–1328). Instead, Pico begins with the two most popular thinkers among contemporary scholastic philosophers, Thomas and Scotus, but in reverse

57 Pico, *Discorso sulla dignità dell'uomo*, 84–86.

58 *Ibid.*, 86.

59 *Ibid.*, 86–88.

60 *Ibid.*, 86: "atque ut a nostris, ad quos postremo philosophia pervenit, nunc exordiar, est in Ioanne Scoto vegetum quiddam atque discussum, in Thoma solidum et equabile, in Egidio tersum et exactum, in Francisco acre et acutum, in Alberto priscum, amplum et grande, in Henrico (ut mihi visum est) semper sublime et venerandum."

order. The last two mentioned here, Albert and Henry, receive special attention: Albert is the only one who gets three instead of two praising adjectives, while Henry gets a stylistic emphasis (“ut mihi visum est, semper”). This might reflect their unique importance to Pico. In any case, all six were specifically chosen to represent “our philosophers,” and in this sense they should all be regarded very seriously in a discussion concerning Pico and his scholastic sources and influences.

Pico’s philosophical method is, as I have shown, an inclusive one, turning the quantity of doctrines into a quality and a feature of a good philosophical discussion which should ignite the glitter of truth (*veritatis fulgor*). This seems like a real personal conviction, not mere rhetoric.⁶¹ In such an approach there should be an important place for tradition which creates a necessary continuity—to some extent, once again, in the footsteps of the Eusebian project of the *Praeparatio Evangelica*.⁶² Pico recognizes that from a purely philosophical perspective it is impossible to focus solely on scholastic philosophy and to be able to fully understand it while dismissing previous achievements of Greek and Arabic philosophers. There are too many essential and deeply rooted connections between these different philosophical cultures which produced and have shared the notion of wisdom. Scholastic philosophy is in many respects the outcome of classical pagan philosophy on the one hand and its interpretations by Arabic Muslim philosophers on the other. This is quite different from the situation in Pico’s times of competing scholastic schools on the one hand and the fashionable classicism of the humanists on the other, a situation in which this strong notion of philosophical tradition and continuity was sometimes dismissed and overlooked.

This notion of tradition and continuity is made possible through Pico’s idea of concord (*concordia*),⁶³ which, beyond its immediate

⁶¹ Ibid., 90.

⁶² Ibid., 90–92.

⁶³ Ibid., 96.

meaning and function (finding agreement and harmony between different philosophical schools and cultures), also means forming a connection between different philosophical traditions and virtually creating a philosophical tradition. Pico's historical (and to some extent critical and systematic) account of magic functions in the same way:⁶⁴ it creates a tradition and a disciplinary continuation between the ancient Greeks and Persians on the one hand and more recent and even contemporary representatives of the discipline on the other.⁶⁵ Pico's distinction between two kinds of magic, one demonic and evil and the other good and useful, the latter being "the absolute consummation of natural philosophy" ("naturalis philosophiae absoluta consummatio"),⁶⁶ is evidence that there are also limits to concord and harmony. The esoteric teachings of the Kabbalists, of the Platonists, or of Orpheus and Zoroaster, who are regarded as the fathers and authors of ancient wisdom ("priscae sapientiae crediti patres et auctores"),⁶⁷ are yet another indication that not all doctrines are in agreement with one another, and that some should remain outside this inner circle of wisdom. In other words, some traditions are not founded upon true and authentic wisdom (for instance, evil magic or predicting astrology, which Pico sharply criticized in a later treatise). But some do: as I have shown (n. 68), there is a strong connection between Greek philosophy and later developments in Muslim and Christian contexts, including of course scholastic philosophy. And since the sayings of Pythagoras were called sacred, coming from the teachings of Orpheus, this is the origin of every great and sublime

64 Ibid., 104–16.

65 Ibid., 110–12: "ex iunioribus autem qui eam olfecerint tres reperio, Alchindum Arabem, Rogerium Baconem et Guilielum Parisiensem." On p. 130 Pico mentions Antonius Cronicus (Antonio Vinciguerra, 1440/46–1502), secretary of the Vatican Republic, who is listed in the *Apology* as a contemporary practitioner of magic. See also Franco Bacchelli, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola e Pier Leone da Spoleto* (Florence: Olschki, 2001), 64, n. 184.

66 Ibid., 104.

67 Ibid., 132.

element we find in Greek philosophy.⁶⁸ The last stage in this tradition is scholastic philosophy.

What we find in Pico is a strong connection between human beings and humanity as such on the one hand and philosophy and philosophical speculation on the other; this connection is regarded as an essential human need in what seems like a variation on the opening sentence of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Pico is talking about philosophy both as a discipline in the scholastic-academic sense (including also, as I have shown, philosophical theology) and as a way of life in the ancient sense (*ἀγωγή*). Moreover, Pico emphasizes the crucial role of an inclusive philosophical tradition which, in its true and authentic stages, reflects a continuity from antiquity to the present and functions as a channel for transmitting ancient wisdom.

Both Ficino and Pico remind us of just how crucial religion and theology were for Renaissance intellectuals in the new political context of the creation, as I have shown in Bruni, of a *civilis societas*, while new theories in moral psychology on the role and function of the human will, as I have shown in Salviati, are constantly presented and discussed by philosophers and theologians, humanists and scholastics.

But to go back to Pico and his *900 Theses*. In the first of nine theses according to Simplicius we find that understanding one's own action is not common to any external sense but is rather unique to the human senses only.⁶⁹ Thus, the ability to reflect upon our own actions is essentially a human ability not shared with other animals as hearing or seeing are. This sounds like an explanation of the Aristotelian "moral sentiment" found in the *Politics* and discussed earlier (n. 10 and context). This thesis is related to the first of three theses according to Ammonius, where we find that the soul's definition presented by Aristotle—"the actuality the body"—when we discuss the rational

68 Ibid., 132.

69 Ibid., 32.

soul, should be understood in a causal rather than a formal fashion.⁷⁰ Pico is transmitting here through Ammonius and Simplicius the notion of internal, conscious self-reflexivity as a unique feature of human beings.

In the course toward modern subjectivity between Petrarch and Descartes I have presented several efforts by Renaissance philosophers to deal with the question *What is so special about human beings?*

⁷⁰ Ibid., *Conclusiones nongentae*, 30–32.

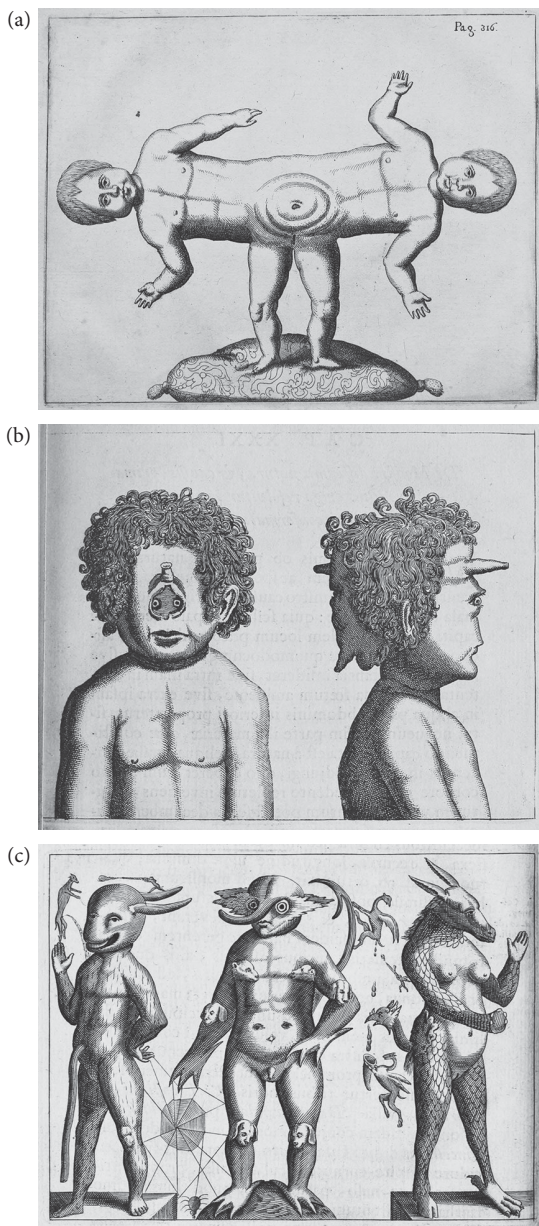


FIGURE 7-9 Three illustrations from Fortunio Liceti, *Monsters* (1665)

CHAPTER 6

Margaret Cavendish on Human Beings

Marcy P. Lascano and Eric Schliesser

Margaret Cavendish is a vitalist, materialist, and monist. She holds that human beings and other natural kinds are parts of the one material entity she calls “nature.” While she thinks that human beings may not be superior to other animals in many ways, she does argue that human beings have a type of knowledge and perception that is unique to their kind, that they strive for the continuance of their being, and that they join together into societies in order to achieve a more peaceful existence. In what follows, we will give a brief overview of Cavendish’s metaphysics of nature, and then turn to her metaphysics of human beings. We will consider the formation of human beings, how their perception and knowledge differ from other non-human animals, how human beings are individuated, and in what sense they can be immortal. Finally, we will turn to her social and political views of human beings. In the end, we will argue, contra

current scholarship,¹ that Cavendish's views about the social nature of the human beings mirror her views about the metaphysical structure of nature. In particular, we show that Cavendish embraces *both* natural and social hierarchy as well as a form of sexual equality that we dub "Platonic feminism."

THE METAPHYSICS OF NATURE

Cavendish holds that everything in nature is material and there is nothing outside of nature. Cavendish's ontology has two levels: The constituent (or essential) parts of matter (the whole of which she refers to as "nature"), and the composed parts of nature, which are the individuals within this whole. It is helpful to think of her two levels of ontology as similar to our current conceptions of the physical world, which has a subatomic level, with material entities that are invisible to our perception (which is analogous to Cavendish's constituent matter) and are the building blocks of the level of the macroscopic objects of our everyday experiences. These macro-level objects are the objects Cavendish would call the composed parts of nature.

Constituent matter is infinite, and in it we can discern three "degrees," "sorts," "types," or "kinds" of matter: rational animate matter, sensitive animate matter, and inanimate matter.² Cavendish is pretty clear that while these degrees of matter can be divided into animate and inanimate matter, we should not think of them as two (or three) distinct and separate things. She insists that there is only one matter. In what respect are they degrees? It makes a lot of intuitive sense to think of degrees of

1 See, especially, Deborah Boyle, *The Well-Ordered Universe: The Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). We engage at length with Boyle's work because she has offered the first sustained philosophical interpretation of Cavendish's views of social and political matters in light of her metaphysics.

2 Cavendish also sometimes says "parts," but because that word has contemporary meanings that Cavendish would reject, we avoid using it here.

density. We might, for instance, think of inanimate matter as the most dense, heavy, and material, and rational matter as the subtlest, lightest sort of matter possible. On this account, there would be a continuum of density within matter. And Cavendish does sometimes talk this way. For instance, in *Philosophical Letters* (PL), she writes: “the truth is, the purity of reason is not so perspicuous and plain to sense, as sense is to reason, the sensitive matter being a grosser substance then the rational.”³ However, in *Grounds of Natural Philosophy*, Cavendish clarifies her position.⁴ She writes: “but, pray mistake me not, when I say, the Inanimate Parts are grosser; as if I meant, they were like some densed Creature; for, those are but Effects, and not Causes: but, I mean gross, dull, heavy Parts, as, that they are not Self-moving; nor do I mean by Purity, Rarity; but Agility: for, Rare or Dense Parts, are Effects, and not Causes: And therefore, if any should ask, Whether the Rational and Sensitive Parts were Rare, or Dense; I answer, They may be Rare or Dense, according as they contract, or dilate their Parts” (GNP 5). Here, Cavendish makes clear that the sense in which rational, sensitive, and inanimate matter are degrees is in the sense not of degrees of density (familiar, say, from Descartes’s natural philosophy) but in degrees of motion. According to Cavendish, density and rarity are *effects* of motion. So any bits of matter can be dense or rare depending on their current motions. However, when we think of the essence or nature of the constituent degrees of matter, we see that rational matter is the most agile—she sometimes says “freer”—and the inanimate matter does not move itself at all but is merely moved by the sensitive matter. So the continuum of matter is from the fastest moving and most free (unencumbered) to the merely moved and least free degree.

3 Cavendish, *Philosophical Letters: or, Modest Reflections Upon some Opinions in Natural Philosophy, maintained By several Famous and Learned Authors of this Age . . .* (London, 1664), 449. Cited as PL followed by page number.

4 Cavendish, *Grounds of Natural Philosophy: Divided into Thirteen Parts: With an Appendix containing Five Parts* (West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press, 1996). Cited as GNP followed by page number.

The animate degrees of matter—rational and sensitive—are self-moving. However, inanimate matter is merely moved by sensitive matter. This slows sensitive matter down a bit. Cavendish calls the inanimate matter a “burden” that reduces the agility of sensitive matter. She provides an analogy for how the sensitive moves the inanimate—it does so as a horse moves a rider, or a hand moves a stick. In these cases, we are to imagine that the rider and the stick are not moving themselves but are carried along by the movement of the horse and hand, respectively. The three degrees, due to their respective types of motion, have different functions within the hierarchically organized whole of matter. She writes: “for as in the exstruction of a house there is first required an architect or surveyor, who orders and designs the building, and puts the labourers to work; next the labourers or workmen themselves; and lastly the materials of which the house is built: so the rational part, said they, in the framing of natural effects, is, as it were, the surveyor or architect; the sensitive, the labouring or working part; and the inanimate, the materials: and all these degrees are necessarily required in every composed action of nature.”⁵ The rational degree of matter functions as the architect or designing parts directing the sensitive degree of matter, which works along with the inanimate matter to compose the actions of a being. Cavendish claims that these degrees of matter are in “complete mixture.” What does Cavendish tell us about complete mixture? One thing she says is this: “for there is such a commixture of animate and inanimate matter, that no particle in Nature can be conceived or imagined, which is not composed of animate matter as well as of inanimate” (OEP 158). Cavendish holds (like Descartes) that matter is infinitely divisible, so there is actually no smallest particle of matter, but she notes that this commixture implies that every degree of matter is contained in every bit of matter, even in,

5 Cavendish, “Argumental Discourse,” in *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (1668), ed. E. O'Neill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 24. Cited as OEP followed by page number. See also OEP 156–57, 181, PL 423–25, 530–31, and GNP 50–52.

were it possible, the smallest atom.⁶ She writes: “since Nature consists of a commixture of animate and inanimate matter, and is self-moving, there can be no part or particle of this composed body of Nature, were it an Atome, that may be call’d Inanimate, by reason there is none that has not its share of animate, as well as inanimate matter, and the commixture of these degrees being so close, it is impossible one should be without the other” (OEP 16). Cavendish also tells us that “Infinite Matter in itself and its own essence is simple and homogeneous” (OEP 199). So the doctrine is that the three degrees are blended in such a way that all three degrees are found in any given portion of matter, and in such a way that any proportionality between the degrees is maintained throughout. We may think of this complete blending as similar to a homogeneous mixture that we find in chemistry. In such mixtures, two or more substances are combined so that the same proportions of the components are maintained throughout any given sample and are such that each substance retains its own chemical identity. Chemical bonds between the components are neither broken nor formed, although new physical properties may result from the mixture. Likewise, Cavendish maintains that although all three degrees are completely blended, each maintains its own degree of motion and freedom.

Cavendish explicitly says that there is infinite animate matter and infinite inanimate matter. But she does not say anywhere (that we have found) that there is more of one degree than another, even though the analogies she uses to discuss the three degrees would certainly lead one to believe that she thinks that there is more sensitive than rational matter and perhaps more inanimate matter than animate matter. Consider her frequently repeated claim that the three degrees of matter are analogous to an architect or designer, workmen, and the materials for building a house. The rational is the designer, the sensitive is the

6 See Jonathan Shaheen, “Part of Nature and Division in Margaret Cavendish’s Materialism,” *Synthese* 196 (2019): 3551–75, for an argument that Descartes and Cavendish have different views about the nature of matter.

builders, and the inanimate is the materials on which they work.⁷ It seems, at least, from experience, that we understand that in this hierarchical order there are more builders than designers, and more materials than builders. If this is how Cavendish understands the proportionality of degrees of matter, then we have reason to think that although there is infinite animate matter and infinite inanimate matter, there is “more” inanimate matter than animate matter, and more sensitive matter than rational matter. We can understand this sense of “more” in the same way we can say that there are infinite real numbers and infinite rational numbers, yet there are more real than rational numbers—infininitely many more.

As we have said, Cavendish holds that rational and sensitive matter are self-moving (animate), and then there is inanimate matter. That some matter is self-moving seems to be a brute fact for Cavendish. There is no deeper explanation for why some matter is self-moving other than that self-motion is the best possible explanation for the variety and change we observe in the world. However, Cavendish does spend a fair amount of time explaining why some matter is not self-moving. Recall that Cavendish holds that the degrees of matter are degrees of motion. When she provides justification for the existence of motionless matter, she argues that it is necessary to balance matter. Without inanimate matter, the sensitive matter might move as quickly as the rational matter, and all things would happen “in an instant.” Cavendish holds that rational and sensitive matter just are reason and sense, both of which she thinks are immediate in our experience. If our thoughts and perceptions were not slowed by inanimate matter, all motion in the world would happen instantaneously. “This triumvirate of the degrees of matter . . . is so necessary to balance and poise nature’s actions, that otherwise the creatures which nature produces, would all be produced alike, and in an instant” (OEP 25–26). Thoughts and

7 For the architect analogy, see PL 151–52; OEP 99; and GNP 61.

perceptions happen quickly; however, things in the world seem to have a sort of permanence, as well as a growth and decay cycle that cannot fully be accounted for by the swift motions of sense and reason. In order for the world to exhibit the sort of permanence and steady, or relatively steady, figures that it does, Cavendish holds that there must be some matter that does not move by itself but is only moved by other matter, which in turn slows down that matter that must carry this burden with it.

Through the complete mixture of the three degrees of matter we get bodies that are self-moving, self-knowing, and perceptive. Since every part of nature is essentially minded, Cavendish is committed to pansychism: universal mindedness. Why does she hold that every part of nature is sensitive and rational? She maintains that without sense there can be no motion and without reason there can be no orderly motion. Since we know by experience that there is such orderly motion in the world, we have reason to believe that every part of nature is minded. She writes: "that every part has not only sensitive, but also rational matter, is evident, not only by the bare motion in every part of nature, which cannot be without sense, for wheresoever is motion there's sense; but also by the regular, harmonious, and well-ordered actions of nature, which clearly demonstrates, that there must needs be reason as well as sense, in every part and particle of nature; for there can be no order, method, or harmony, especially such as appears in the actions of nature, without there to be reason to cause that order and harmony" (OEP 207). The orderly self-motion of nature shows that nature is sensitive and rational in all her parts. For it is impossible that the infinite degrees of nature would move in a harmonious way without "knowing how, wither, or why to move" (OEP 207).⁸

The underlying intuition can be explained by way of the Cartesian physics she rejects. In Descartes's physics every body preserves its state

⁸ This is the same language Hobbes uses when he speaks of the voluntary actions of human beings.

unless deflected from it by another body. But the state that is preserved is rectilinear. One may well wonder how an inert body “knows” to preserve the state of a straight line, not to mention what such directionality amounts to in a plenum without any fixed points. Descartes does not explain, and it is hard to see how he can explain, such questions.⁹ So, in light of lack of explanatory resources in a mechanical philosophy, it is quite natural to think that observed order must be, in part, a consequence of the constituent-level entities having knowledge of their own current motions as well as the motions of the parts adjoining them. (This is a form of innate self-knowledge for Cavendish.) This allows bits of matter to adjust to other bits of matter in virtue of being sensitive to each other’s presence and, thereby, indirectly to the whole universe’s order.¹⁰

While Cavendish holds that nature produces generally harmonious effects due to the cooperation of the rational and sensitive parts, she also thinks that self-motion and the infinite divisibility of matter are causes of variety and irregularity in the world. “For though the several changes of motion, and different shapes or figures of several creatures, strive to make disturbance and discord, yet the matter being one in it self, makes peace and concord”.¹¹ Disorder, according to Cavendish, is as natural as order. It is necessary for variety in the world. Thus, because nature is self-moving, it is capable of division and disruption, which causes variety, but because nature is also rational, there is a large degree of regularity in the whole of nature. Cavendish can hereby dispense with laws of nature and, thereby, with a God that commands or

9 A related problem shows up in Descartes’s collision laws, where some quantity is preserved through the collision, and somehow the second body “knows” to adjust accordingly. Spinoza seems to have discerned similar problems in Descartes, see Schliesser, Eric, “Spinoza and the Philosophy of Science: Mathematics, Motion, and Being,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, ed. Michael Della Rocca (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 184.

10 The underlying insight here is close to Boyle’s version, *Well-Ordered Universe*, 93. However, we reject the strong normativity that Boyle claims for rules of nature.

11 *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (London, 1655), significantly altered 2nd ed. (London, 1663), 11.

is the source of them. Cavendish often describes nature as balanced and poised. This balance between composition and division maintains nature as one continuous matter.

The self-motions of nature include composing and dividing, contracting and dilating, respiration and emission, perception, and so on. While Cavendish says there are infinite motions at the composed level, she seems to mean infinitely many particular motions rather than types of motions. In fact, it seems that there are really only four primary types of motion for Cavendish (the rest being modifications of these): the most basic and often mentioned is composition, but division, contraction, and dilation also play significant roles in her later philosophical writings. She writes: "and the chief actions of nature, are composition and division, which produce all the variety of nature" (OEP 140). According to Cavendish, every act of composition is also an act of division, that is, every time a part divides from one part, it joins to another. (There is no vacuum.)¹² Composition and division are how individuals are composed.

Human Beings and Other Individuals

When parts compose and move as one, we get a particular individual, like a human being or plant. She writes:

but, what we call finite parts, are nothing else but several corporeal figurative motions, which make all the difference that is between the figures or parts of nature, both in their kinds, sorts, and particulars. And thus finite and particular parts are all one, called thus, by reason they have limited and circumscribed figures, by which they are discerned from each other; but not single figures, for they are all joined in one body, and are parts, of the one infinite whole, which is

12 "Thus it remains firm, that self-motion is the only cause of the various parts and changes of figures; and that when parts move or separate themselves from parts, they move and join to other parts, at the same point of time" (OEP 127).

nature; and these figures being all one and the same with their parts of matter, change according as their parts change, that is, by composition and division. (OEP 31)

That is to say, for Cavendish, the existence of finite entities as finite is, in a certain sense, an epistemic consequence of their limitation and the existence of cognizing beings (which are finite, and so on). Cavendish here echoes Platonist doctrines that finite beings are really only one entity because they are emanated from a single source. For Cavendish, boundaries serve an epistemic role in the perceptions of limited beings like us. While there are determinate figures in motions that we acknowledge as natural kinds, these individuals are also, and more fundamentally, parts of the whole of nature.

We can see now that human beings result from the movements of matter determining certain circumscribed figures and motions—those of a human being. For Cavendish, human beings are one of the many natural kinds we find in nature.

Cavendish believes that the matter of human beings is held together by sympathetic motions and love. All of nature generally exhibits sympathetic motions both within one composed body and between composed bodies. She writes: “an influence is this; when as the corporeal figurative motions, in different kinds, and sorts of creatures, or in one and the same sorts, or kinds, move sympathetically: And though there be antipathetical motions, as well as sympathetical; yet, all the infinite parts of matter, are agreeable in their nature, as being all material, and self-moving; and by reason there is no vacuum, there must of necessity be an influence amongst all the parts of nature” (GNP 15–16). She argues that the parts of nature, being one whole, naturally have a sympathetic unity. She writes: “Nature may use more or less force as she pleases: Also she can and doth often use opposite actions, and often sympathetical and agreeable actions, as she pleases; for Nature having a free power to move, may move as she will; but being wise, she moves as she thinks best, either in her separating or uniting motions,

for continuance, as well as for variety” (PL 214). Every part of nature has not only self-motion and self-knowledge but also self-love, which results from this motion and knowledge. Passionate love, which Cavendish glosses as *desire* or *sympathetical motion*, is something that occurs between parts and is the bond that holds them together. Her account of sympathetic motions is in keeping with traditional accounts of sympathy, which claim that such sympathy only holds among entities that share a (fundamental) likeness.¹³

Parts of individuals, which Cavendish calls a “society,” like human beings, have passionate love for one another as a result of their unity. “Passionate Love belongs to several Parts; so that the several parts of one society, as one creature, have both passionate love, and self-love, as being sympathetically united in one society: Also, not only the parts of one and the same society, may have passionate love to each other; but, between several societies; and not only several societies of one sort, but of different sorts” (GNP 68). The composition and structure of a human being enables powers and abilities that are different from those of minerals, plants, or other animals. According to Cavendish, different types of interior motions, which are the motions that determine the figure (structure), nature, and powers, or faculties, of an entity, cause different exterior motions, which are those motions that are the perceptible features of an entity. Each type of figure and structure also causes the particular sort of perceptive capacities and knowledge that is associated with that natural kind. She writes:

this knowledge differs according to the nature of each figure or creature; for I do not mean that this sense and knowledge I speak of, is only an animal sense and knowledge, as some have misinterpreted; for animal sense and knowledge is but particular, and belongs only to that sort of creatures which are animals; but I mean such sense and

13 See the discussion of the so-called likeness principle in Eric Schliesser, “Introduction: On Sympathy,” in *Sympathy: A History*, ed. E. Schliesser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 3–14.

knowledge as is proper to the nature of each figure: so that animal creatures have animal sense and knowledge; vegetables, a vegetative sense and knowledge; minerals, a mineral sense and knowledge; and so for the rest of all kinds and sorts of creatures. (OEP 207)

There are two types of knowledge, according to Cavendish.¹⁴ First, as already mentioned, every bit of matter in nature has self-knowledge, which is an immediate knowledge of the motions, shape, organization, and perceptive capacities it currently has. She writes: “as infinite nature has an infinite self-motion and self-knowledge; so every part and particle has a particular and finite self-motion and self-knowledge, by which it knows itself, and its own actions, and perceives also other parts and actions” (OEP 138). Cavendish calls self-knowledge the foundation of all other knowledge since the type of perception a thing has depends upon its current motion, shape, organization, and capacities. Given that any bit of matter could be associated with any number of kinds of beings, every bit of matter must know what its current figure and motion is. For instance, matter that, due to sympathetic motions, is shaped human eye-wise, will have the capacity to perceive objects at a distance. Likewise, a worm’s perceptive abilities differ from a human being’s perceptive abilities. But since any given bit of matter is capable of belonging at some point to a worm and at some other time to a human, it must know what it is now. She writes: “and as the figures and parts alter by their compositions and divisions, so do both interior and exterior particular knowledges: for a tree, although it has sensitive and rational knowledge and perception, yet it has not an animal knowledge and perception; and if it should be divided into numerous parts, and these again be composed with other parts, each would have such knowledge and perception, as the nature of their figure required”

14 We should note that by “knowledge” Cavendish does not mean Cartesian certainty; rather she holds that knowledge of the external world comes in degrees of certainty, with the highest certainty being obtained by self-knowledge and through “regular” perception, which in the case of human beings, is accurate patterning.

(OEP 170–71). The other type of knowledge that human beings have is knowledge of exterior objects. This knowledge is gained through the sensitive and rational parts “patterning” themselves in accordance with external objects. Patterning is a type of occasional causation where the exterior sensory organs of a creature map the exterior motions of an object.¹⁵ In patterning, information is transferred from the creature’s sensory organs to the interior of the creature (brain and heart), and this causes the creature to move in accordance with its own interior nature in response to the exterior movements of the object.¹⁶ Cavendish tells us that we cannot be certain that the perception of nonhuman animals works in the same way as that of human animals. However, she believes that it is likely that other animals perceive via patterning.

Freedom and the Afterlife

As we have said, according to Cavendish, human beings are composed by motions and held in union by sympathetic motions and agreements. One question that arises from the notion of parts being in agreement is whether composed parts, like human beings, are free with respect to their movements and actions. Here, there is a fair amount of scholarly debate. David Cunning writes: “Cavendish supposes that the bodies of nature tend to be free, but her understanding of freedom is wholly

15 Occasional causation occurs when a body or object, rather than efficiently causing an effect in a second body or object, merely acts as an occasion for the second body or object to affect a change in itself in accordance with the occasional cause.

16 We can use an example to demonstrate how perception works in human beings. Imagine we are looking at a cat. Cavendish claims that a human being cannot know the interior motions of the cat but can know *that* the cat has its own interior motions, which are the reason why it has the shape and capacities it has. However, all we can perceive of the cat are its exterior motions. This includes its shape, size, color, outward motion, texture, etc. As humans, we have interior motions that determine the shapes of our eyes and our ability to see as we do (as well as the capacities of our other senses). When we perceive the exterior motions of the cat, we pattern these motions through our perceptive senses, and this information is carried into our brains. The cat does not emit particles or come into contact with us in any way during the perception of sight. The cat is an occasional cause of the self-motion of our perceptive organs. In cases of occasional causation, there is no need for contact between the occasional cause (the cat) and the efficient cause (our sensory organs). In fact, it often does not involve contact at all.

compatibilist,”¹⁷ that is, she holds that human freedom is compatible with deterministic laws of nature. Cunning argues that the possible motions within nature are fixed, and so all the bodies in nature have no alternative to the motions they in fact have. He notes that for Cavendish “what it is for a body to be free is for it to move in accord with its interests and goals without interference.”¹⁸ Thus, Cunning argues that Cavendish’s account of freedom is very much like that of Thomas Hobbes—it is freedom of action. Karen Detlefsen has argued that Cavendish’s account of occasional causation requires a libertarian account of freedom, where human beings are able to do other than they in fact do, since the perceiver is the “principal agent” and must be free to initiate the patterns of external objects or not.¹⁹ Deborah Boyle has recently argued that “treating freedom as a fundamental feature of both the natural order and human relationships can distort, and perhaps overly idealize, Cavendish’s views.”²⁰ Boyle correctly notes that Cavendish very rarely mentions freedom and nowhere provides a detailed account of human freedom, saying that she will leave such matters up to “Divines to decide it” (PL 225). However, Boyle goes on to argue for a libertarian account of freedom based on both textual evidence and claims that Cavendish’s natural philosophy requires such an account of freedom in order to make sense of irregularities in nature.²¹

In brief, we are inclined to the compatibilist reading of freedom in Cavendish’s natural philosophy, and we maintain that all that is required for the consistency of Cavendish’s views concerning causation and social structure is her account of voluntary action, which she frequently repeats. She writes, for example: “by voluntary actions I understand self actions; that is such actions whose principle of motion is

17 David Cuning, *Cavendish* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 212.

18 Cuning, *Cavendish*, 213.

19 Karen Detlefsen, “Atomism, Monism, and Causation in the Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish,” *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy* 3 (2006): 199–240.

20 Boyle, *Well-Ordered Universe*, 38.

21 Boyle, *Well-Ordered Universe*, chap. 4.

within themselves, and doth not proceed from such an exterior agent, as doth the motion of the inanimate part of matter" ("Argumental Discourse," in OEP, 19). Both at the constituent level and the composed level, there is self-moving matter. Since all the parts at the composed level of bodies are completely blended and every part contains self-moving matter, it is fair to say that human beings have self-action and so voluntary action. This is not to say, however, that it is possible for human beings to act whatever way they please, for it seems clear that the motions of nature are constrained to a large degree.²² As Cavendish writes, "though every self-moving Part, or Corporeal Motion, have *free-will* to move after what manner they please; yet, by reason there can be no single Parts, several Parts unite in one Action, and so there must be united Actions: for, though every particular Part may divide from particular Parts; yet those that divide from some, are *necessitated* to join with other Parts, at the same point of time of division . . . so that Division, and Composition or Joining, is as one and the same act" (GNP 6, emphasis added).²³

Cavendish's discussion of the possibility of resurrection also contains her most straightforward account of individuation and identity over time. This discussion occurs in two sections of the Appendix to

22 "For, it is well to be observed, that there is a stint or proportion in all nature's corporeal figurative motions, to wit, in her particulars, as we may plainly see in every particular sort or species of creatures, and their constant and orderly productions; for though particular creatures may change into an infinite variety of figures, by the infinite variety of nature's corporeal figurative motions; yet each kind or sort is stinted so much, as it cannot run into extremes, nor make a confusion, although it make a distinguishment between every particular creature, even in one and the same sort. *And hence we may conclude, that nature is neither absolutely necessitated, nor has an absolute free will:* for, she is so much necessitated, that she depends upon the all powerful God, and cannot work beyond herself, or beyond her own nature; and yet hath so much liberty, that in her particulars she works as she pleaseth, and as God has given her power; but she being wise, acts according to her infinite natural wisdom, which is the cause of her orderly government in all particular productions, changes and dissolutions; so that all creatures in their particular kinds, do move and work as nature pleases, orders and directs," OEP 108–9, emphasis added.

23 Boyle claims that Cavendish uses the term "free-will" to indicate libertarian freedom as opposed to her use of the term "free" where she may mean mere self-motion. See Boyle, *Well-Ordered Universe*, chap. 4. For criticism, see Marcy Lascano, "The Well-Ordered Universe: The Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish," by Deborah Boyle," *Mind* 128 (2019), 260–68.

the *Grounds*. Here, she considers the question “*Whether all the particular parts of every human creature, at the time of the Resurrection, be, to meet and joyn, as being of one and the same society?*” (GNP 259). She answers with a yes. She first considers whether human beings would be resurrected with the body of their “most perfect age.” However, she sees problems with this account. She writes: “if a dead child did rise a man, as at his most perfect age, it could not be said, he rises according to a natural man, having more parts than by nature he ever had; and an old man, fewer parts than naturally he hath had: So, what by adding and diminishing the parts of particular men, it would not cause only injustice; but not any particular human creature, would be the same as he was” (GNP 259–60). Her view is that in order for an individual to be resurrected as the same individual, every bit of matter connected with that individual from its origin to its dissolution must be included. She writes: “if it was not so, then every particular human society would be imperfect at the time of their resurrection: for, if they should only rise with some of their parts, as (for example) when they were in the strength of their age, then all those parts that had been either before, or after that time, would be unjustly dealt with” (GNP 259). Likewise, in a discussion of whether a human being, having been dissolved, could unite again and be the same individual, she writes: “if all the parts of one society, as for example, a man, from the first time of his production, to the time of his dissolution, should, after division, come to meet and unite; that man, or any other creature, would be a monstrous creature, as having more parts than was agreeable to the nature of his kind. The Major Part’s opinion was, that though the society, viz. the man, would be a society of greater magnitude; yet not any ways different from the nature of his kind” (GNP 258).²⁴ What we see from this discussion is that although for our everyday purposes it is fine to say that a society is the same society at two different times even though it has

24 In this passage, Cavendish is depicting an argument between the minor and major parts of her mind. We take the “major part” to be the view she favors.

changed some of its matter, strictly and philosophically speaking, we are seeing two parts of the whole society. All the matter, from the time of production until the time of dissolution of an individual's figure, are needed to constitute the whole of an individual human being.²⁵

Cavendish does not seem to think that there is an ultimate end of natural beings (nature's only end is to "keep the peace.") She does allow that it is possible that human beings are connected with a supernatural soul that could somehow continue their existence, albeit in a way completely different from their natural existence. So, although she thinks it unlikely that human beings will be resurrected (as she thinks it is unlikely that the same matter should reform in exactly the same way), she wants to show that her philosophical system does not rule out the possibility of such an afterlife. And indeed she does believe that human beings desire an afterlife. The love and sympathy that holds the parts of human beings together causes "a Rational Fear of disuniting, or dissolving" (GNP 130). So human beings desire to maintain their society as long as possible, yet they realize that they cannot remain in this mode of existence forever. Human beings also realize that no afterlife that resembles their current life is possible, so we seek, as Boyle has emphasized, some sort of fame by which we will be remembered by other human beings and thereby live on in memory.²⁶

In every Regular Human Society, there is a Passionate Love amongst the Associated Parts, like fellow-Students of one College, or fellow-Servants in one House, or Brethren in one Family, or Subjects in one Nation, or Communicants in one Church: So the Self-moving Parts of a Human Creature, being associated, love one another, and therefore do endeavour to keep their Society from dissolving. But perceiving, by the example of the lives of the same sort of Creatures,

25 Cavendish's views on identity over time prefigure a four-dimensionalist theory of personal identity.

26 Boyle, *Well-Ordered Universe*, 117–34.

that the property of their Nature is such, that they must dissolve in a short time, this causes these Human sorts of Creatures, (being very ingenuous) to endeavour an after-life: but, perceiving again, that their after-life cannot be the same as the present life is, they endeavour (since they cannot keep their own Society from dissolving) that their Society may remain in remembrance amongst the particular and general Societies of the same sort of Creatures, which we name *Mankind*: And this Design causes all the Sensitive and Rational Parts, in one Society, to be industrious, to leave some Mark for a lasting Remembrance, amongst their fellow-Creatures: which general remembrance, Man calls *Fame*. (GNP 75–6)

This desire for the continuation of both the individual society and the society of humankind causes individuals to be industrious, to leave behind worthwhile works, and to build lasting social structures. Cavendish calls this longing to be remembered by other human beings a desire for fame that it is unique to human beings, who are uniquely aware of their own finite existence.²⁷

Cavendish's "Political" Metaphysics

In the previous sections we have offered an analysis of Cavendish's metaphysics of nature and metaphysics of human nature. We have noted—without trying to call intrusive attention to—the political metaphors and tropes she uses to describe her own metaphysics. But this metaphysics has certain characteristics that have significant political resonances and consequences. Here we make explicit some of the most salient political features of her metaphysics. Each individual is a society composed of, and produced by, the joint action of its hierarchically organized subordinate parts. We treat these organized human societies as political by definition in virtue of their involving hierarchy and

²⁷ Boyle, *Well-Ordered Universe*, 131.

subordination. That is, political structure is, as it were, woven into the very structure of Cavendish's metaphysics.²⁸ There is no place in nature that is free from politics. The claim that Cavendish's metaphysics can be understood in political terms is justified by the following three arguments.

First, human beings contain a hierarchical order. As noted, Cavendish often refers to individuals, including human beings, as a "society" because they are composed of a number of structural elements that are moving together by agreement. By the sixteenth century "society" (from the Latin *socius* or fellow) had taken on the meaning of a friendly association and was used to describe a small band of friends as well as larger social structures. In Cavendish, the structure of each society is functionally and hierarchically organized, like a corporate or political entity (recall the architect analogy) that is entered into voluntarily because it is the product of a mutual agreement among the constituents.

To be sure, Cavendish rejects the social contract (familiar to her from reading Hobbes) as either a legitimating device or an account of the origin of political order.²⁹ For Cavendish states are usually founded through force.³⁰ But she does think that even after conquest, political unity is constituted by the consent of all.³¹

There is a hierarchy among the constituent degrees of matter—rational animate, sensitive animate, and inanimate matter—that runs from the most free to least free. This hierarchy is also one of control: rational animate matter is the locus of decision and order. The sensitive

28 We are not the first to recognize this. See Neil Ankers, "Paradigms and Politics: Hobbes and Cavendish Contrasted," in *A Princely Brave Woman: Essays on Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle*, ed. Stephen Clucas (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003), and Lisa Sarashon, *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

29 See Boyle, *Well-Ordered Universe*, 149–50.

30 Hobbes also discusses monarchy by acquisition in *Leviathan* II.xx.

31 See "A Soldier's Oration concerning the Form of Government" (1662), in *Orations on a Disordered or yet Unsettled Government*, in Margaret Cavendish, *Political Writings*, ed. Susan James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 276. Hereafter cited as PW.

animate matter carries out the designs of the rational matter, and the inanimate matter is forced to comply. Of course, this way of putting it is a bit simplistic because this structure is, fractal-like, repeated both at the constituent level and in all the parts of the composed level. Each ordered individual is a regular society that is composed of parts that are also hierarchically structured. But, as we will show, the normativity of it is relative to the members of a particular society. But there is an important constraint on Cavendish's hierarchical understanding of individuals.

While Cavendish is quite clear that there are natural hierarchies, she thinks that all the elements of an individual/society participate voluntarily in the unity. That is, the hierarchical, internal organization of each individual is akin to, at least, a tacit agreement that supports an elective monarchy. This language of monarchy may make it seem that force is the animating principle within an ordered whole (society/individual). But that's not Cavendish's view. And while there is no denying that force may play some role in the background to maintain the hierarchy, the hierarchy flourishes because it is guided by reason from above, which leads by "gentle persuasions" (discussed later) and is animated by voluntary cooperation informed by duty from below.³²

Second, Cavendish's approach conforms to the traditional understanding of sympathy: mutual sympathy is only possible among likes within a unity. So, because there is mutual sympathy, there is a fundamental unity within society.³³

In a society, all the composing individuals sympathize with each other. The effects of sympathy are pleasing and create harmony. Or we may say that a society characterized by mutual sympathy is a

32 "As for example, in the Politick body of a Commonwealth, one Traytor is apt to cause all the Kingdom to take armes; and although every member knows not particularly of the Traytor, and of the circumstances of his crime, yet every member, if regular, knows its particular duty, which causes a general agreement to assist each other; and as it is with a Common-wealth, so it is also with an animal body; for if there be factions amongst the parts of an animal body, then straight there arises a Civil War" (OEP 1666, 62).

33 See Schliesser, "Introduction," 7.

harmonious unity. Thus, this unity and sympathy is expressed as mutual love. Boyle has argued that “self-love of the whole creature . . . results from the passionate love between the parts . . . self-love accounts for the unity over time of the ‘societies.’”³⁴ We think, by contrast, that for Cavendish a *unity* makes possible the (sympathetic) passionate love between the parts, which is a kind of cohesive mechanism to *maintain* the unity.

Finally, Individuals strive to maintain themselves as a real unity or as a remembered unity. We call this Cavendish’s “*conatus* principle.”³⁵ While all dependent things come to an end, as long as they are a particular ordered whole they try to maintain themselves as a unity. But because at least some individuals within the natural order come to know that all things will come to an end, they try to create conditions of posthumous fame such that their unity is remembered. Boyle has argued that for Cavendish this desire for recognition is unique to humans and founded on well-grounded doubt about the existence of an afterlife.³⁶ This striving creates an incentive to do the kind of deeds worth being remembered for. Thus, because real unities strive to be remembered as good unities by other (unknown) unities they engage in works. The very same striving can also be a source of disorder when it devolves, as Boyle notes, into pursuit of public recognition.

34 Boyle, *Well-Ordered Universe*, 93; see also 127. It is not entirely clear that Boyle is right to claim that in Cavendish self-love is constructed out of passionate love between the parts. See GNP 68: “Of the Differences between Self-Love, and Passionate Love. Self-love, is like Self-knowledge, which is an innate Nature; and therefore is not that Love Man names Passionate Love: for, Passionate Love belongs to several Parts; so that the several parts of one Society, as one Creature, have both Passionate Love, and Self-love, as being sympathetically united in one Society: Also, not only the Parts of one and the same Society, may have Passionate Love to each other; but, between several Societies; and not only several Societies of one Sort, but of different Sorts.”

35 The Latin *conatus* translates as “striving.”

36 Boyle, *Well-Ordered Universe*, 132; Boyle quotes Cavendish, *Worlds Olio*, London: Printed for J. Martin and J. Allestrye (1655), 145. This claim is central to Boyle’s *denial* that there is a systematic unity between Cavendish’s political and metaphysical views. We think it is notable that Boyle ignores the possibility that for Cavendish there may be angels who wish to have such proper recognition; that is, to be famous for their goodness. Admittedly Cavendish does not think we can know anything about immaterial substances as they are not part of nature. But the gap in our possible knowledge does not strike us as sufficient to claim that Cavendish’s thought is not systematic.

CAVENDISH'S SOCIAL-POLITICAL ACCOUNT
OF HUMAN BEINGS

Boyle argues that "Cavendish has a grim view of human behavior."³⁷ She claims that humans use their libertarian free will to do what is in their own interest and to subvert the "norms" of society. She argues that self-love and the desire for fame can be directed either to virtuous actions or to evil ones (infamy). Boyle argues that Cavendish does not deny that a monarch is needed to curb the generally bad nature of human beings. Boyle thinks that Cavendish holds that humans are less inclined to social behavior than other animals because of their desire for fame, and she sees this as a real distinction between Cavendish's natural and political philosophies.

While we agree with Boyle that Cavendish recognizes that human beings' desire for fame may lead them to ignoble acts that contribute to the destruction of human political societies through rebellion and war, we do not believe that this indicates that she thinks that human nature is more deficient than the natures of other creatures. In what follows we will stress two points. First, that according to Cavendish human social and political societies, as parts of nature, have a natural growth and decay cycle. Second, that while Boyle claims that Cavendish denies that an effective sovereign can rule by force, and so must be virtuous and lead merely by example, Boyle leaves out the possibility that a sovereign might lead by gentle persuasion, which, as an example of a more managerial style of leadership, leaves open the possibility for the rule of women.

Cavendish asserts that human social and political arrangements are, like all macro-level things, parts of Nature. As an individual human being grows to maturity and then declines and dies, so too do human societies. No human society lasts forever. It is true that Cavendish stresses the merits of peace and stability in human

³⁷ *Well-Ordered Universe*, 142.

relations, but Nature is not merely peaceful and ordered, it is also balanced and varied. These values require trade-offs, and the destruction of once stable and peaceful individuals and societies is balanced by their eventual destruction and replacement by new individuals and societies. This is how variety is achieved. So, while individuals and groups of human beings will endeavor to remain in their societies as long as they can, all societies must eventually dissolve and give way to new ones. Even though this is true, it is still important for us to make clear how it is that a sovereign can best keep the peace as long as she may.

Boyle claims that according to Cavendish sovereigns cannot use force or persuasion in order to maintain power;³⁸ a sovereign can only get people to obey by being a good example of a virtuous leader. The claim that a leader should be virtuous is confirmed by Cavendish's *Blazing World* (PW 89), where the Duchess tells the Empress that it will be to her eternal honor to reestablish the laws previously held in the kingdom because they were more conducive to peace and harmony.³⁹ The Duchess encourages the Empress to bring about unity in the kingdom, "that is, to have but one Sovereign, one Religion, one Law, and one Language, so that all the World might be but as one united Family, without divisions" (PW 87). But Cavendish also seems to argue for gentle persuasions: "for she [the Empress] knew well, that belief was a thing not to be forced or pressed upon the people, but to be instilled into their minds by gentle persuasions; and after this manner she encouraged them also in all other duties and employments: for fear, though it makes people obey, yet does it not last so long, nor is it so sure a means to keep them to their duties, as love" (PW 51).

³⁸ *Well-Ordered Universe*, 153.

³⁹ *Blazing World*, in *Political Writings*, ed. Susan James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 89. Cited as PW followed by page number.

Platonic Feminism

Cavendish has a hierarchical conception of human nature, unlike some modern feminists.⁴⁰ But we think Cavendish is what we might call a *Platonic* feminist: somebody who rejects natural equality but, while accepting natural hierarchies (including, alas, racial ones), asserts that the best women are just as capable of ruling as the best men if they are properly educated or cultivated. A Platonic feminist thinks that qualified women should be given the same privileges as qualified men.⁴¹

We think that Cavendish provides her views on the art of gentle persuasion in *Sociable Letters*, especially Letters 61 and 150, as an instance of estate management (or household economy), which since Aristotle and Xenophon has been thought intrinsic to political theory. For example, she writes that

a Good Master is to know How to Command, When to Command, and What to Command; also When to Bestow, What to Bestow, & How much to Bestow on a Good Servant; also to fit Servants to Employments, and Employments to Servants; also to know How and When to Restrain them, and when to give them Liberty; also to observe, which of his Servants be fit to be Ruled with Austerity or Severity, and which with Clemency, and to Reward and Punish them Properly, Timely and Justly; Likewise when to make them

⁴⁰ *Well-Ordered Universe*, 166–67.

⁴¹ We understand feminism as opposition to sexist oppression. In a justifiably famous essay, Julia Annas shows how Plato is no feminist from the vantage point of contemporary feminism (by which Annas explicitly means a liberal, rights-oriented feminism); “Plato’s Republic and Feminism,” *Philosophy* 51 (1976): 307–21. The problem is—and here we echo Eileen O’Neill—that egalitarian commitments have also effaced appreciation and knowledge of women, often aristocratic women, who argued for women’s political potential or contribution on, say, meritocratic grounds. Eileen O’Neill, “Disappearing Ink: Early Modern Women Philosophers and Their Fate in History,” in *Philosophy in a Feminist Voice: Critiques and Reconstructions*, ed. Janet Kourany, 17–62 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998). As Serene Khader has argued forcefully, in contexts of sexist oppression, women’s constrained choices may end up promoting what seem illiberal strategies. See Khader, Serene J. *Decolonizing universalism: A transnational feminist ethic*. Studies in Feminist Philosophy, 2018.

Work, and when to let them Play or Sport; as also when to Keep them at a Distance, and when to Associate Himself with them.⁴²

Cavendish calls explicit attention to the political analogy when she compares these to the rule over “Subjects to their Natural Prince.” This presupposes contextual judgments about people’s individual characters and needs as well as knowledge about how they are to negotiate their (hierarchically organized) social roles. It also presupposes knowledge of how we respond to (nonviolent) incentives (see SL 150).

In fact, we would argue that Boyle underestimates Cavendish’s commitment to the idea that women can be good rational masters, too, alongside their husbands, or independent from them.⁴³ This is manifested by the practical knowledge, and the “reason,” of the “Governess” of her estate, who reveals a subtle understanding of economics, including the roles of opportunity costs and human capital in the organization of labor (SL 150). Moreover, she advocates for education of the female servants not primarily on economic grounds but to “Inrich their Understandings, and Increase their Knowledges, and Quicken their Wit, all which may make their Life Happy” and, in part, “to Manage a Plentiful Fortune Wisely” (SL 150). As our term “Platonic feminism” suggests, Cavendish did not invent this position; she shares such a feminism with Marie De Gournay and her exact contemporary Anna Maria Van Schurman (although there is no evidence of mutual influence).

One may object that we have offered slender evidence of Cavendish’s Platonic feminism so far. But we think it is woven into her representation of nature. For example, she writes: “for though Nature is old, yet she is not a Witch, but a grave, wise, methodical Matron, ordering

42 Margaret Cavendish, *CCXI Sociable Letters*, London: William Wilson, 1664. Cited as SL followed by page number.

43 Boyle writes that “while Cavendish is aware of the feminist (or proto-feminist) position that women are ‘equal by nature,’ she does not herself accept that view” (*Well-Ordered Universe*, 76).

her Infinite family, which are her several parts, with ease and facility, without needless troubles and difficulties; for these are onely made through the ignorance of her several parts or particular Creatures, not understanding their Mistress, Nature, and her actions and government, for which they cannot be blamed; for how should a part understand the Infinite body, when it doth not understand it self; but Nature understands her parts better, then they do her" (PL 302–3). Here nature is represented as the wise and methodical female ruler of an estate who understands the proper arrangement of things.⁴⁴ This is so even if her subjects fail to understand her as well as she does them, and this corresponds to the hierarchical nature of the rule over subjects by the rational ruler. Reasoned leadership here is gendered female.

In fact, and to close on a note of speculation, if one accepts the possibility that women were, by Cavendish's lights, actively engaged in estate management, there is a clear hint that she thinks women ought to play a larger role in political life. As she writes, "a private Family is more regular and better ordered then a great State or Commonwealth" (PL 534).

CONCLUSION

In this essay we have treated Cavendish as a metaphysician of nature, of which human beings are a part. Hers is a distinctive metaphysics of human nature. Humans are functionally and hierarchically organized kinds that are, themselves, composed of many societies and can enter into societies (that are functionally and hierarchically organized). We have argued that this metaphysics grounds her social and political philosophy, but we have also shown that social tropes and metaphors

44 A witch, by contrast, seems to promote disorder. We note that Cavendish is fully aware of the implication that any powerful woman would be thought a witch—someone who performs her deeds by charms and malevolent magic. For her denial of the existence of witches, see PL 227–29 and 298–303.

provide key organizing principles in her metaphysics, such that there is a nontrivial sense in which politics pervades her philosophy of nature. This is due to the fact that both kinds of societies are material parts of nature with similar structures. In addition, we have called attention to the fact that, according to Cavendish, the qualities that make one a good estate manager would also serve to make one capable of rational rulership, which opens the door to viewing women as capable of such rule.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ We thank the audience feedback at the Toronto workshop where we first presented this material as well as the editor of the volume for expert guidance.

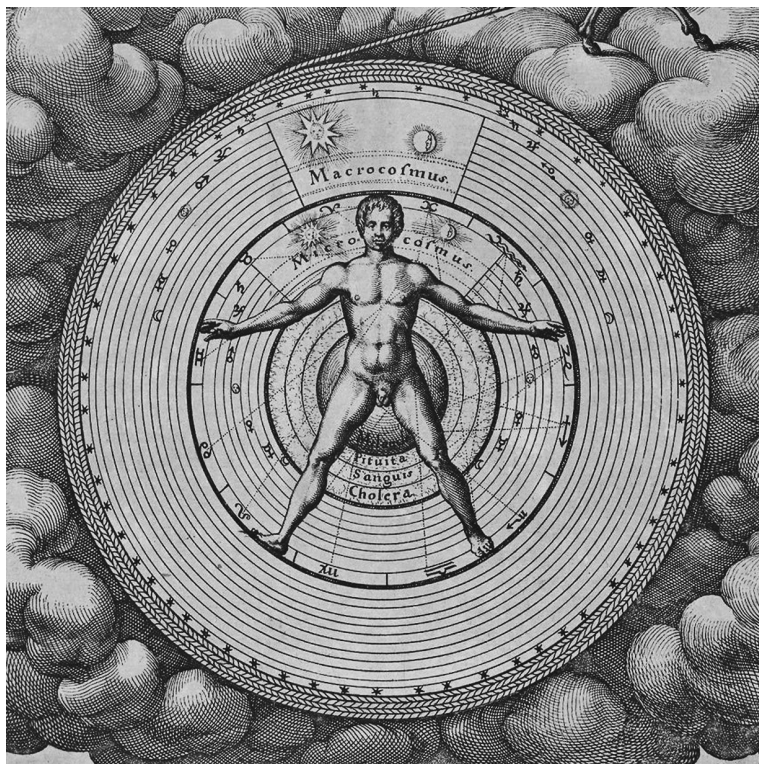


FIGURE 10 Human being as a microcosm of the universe: title page from Robert Fludd, *Utriusque cosmi maioris scilicet et minoris metaphysica, physica atque technica historia* (1624)

Spinoza on the Good Life for Humans

Ursula Renz

Spinoza's attitude toward humanity is marked by a striking ambivalence. On the one hand he holds rather deflationary views about human nature as specifically different. Crucially, following the meta-physical vocabulary established in the beginning of the *Ethics*, humans are merely modes or modifications of substance,¹ which claim entails the denial of any sort of substantial forms.² Thus humans and animals are subsumed under the same category of essentially dependent entities, and their forms—rather than being grounded in specific

¹ This follows from axiom 1 and proposition 14 of part 1 of the *Ethics*, henceforth E1a1 and E1p14. Further abbreviations I use are: “app” for appendix, “c” for corollary, “d” for definition, “praef” for preface, and “s” for scholium. Passages from the Spinoza's works are quoted from *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, two vols., ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985; reprint, 2016), referred to henceforth as C I and C II.

² So E2p10 says: “the being of substance does not pertain to the essence of man, or substance does not constitute the form of man” (C I, 454).

life-forms—correspond to structural patterns, which in turn are the effect of more or less contingent causal histories.³ As a result, the assumption of a categorical distinction between human and nonhuman animals is dismissed,⁴ whereas the idea of singular essences becomes a driving factor in Spinoza's thought about humanity.

This metaphysical outlook is refined by Spinoza's notion of physical constitution of individuals as it is introduced in the physical digression contained in part 2 of the *Ethics*.⁵ Considered as bodily individuals, both humans and animals consist in complexes of smaller physical particulars. While these complexes are shaped and diversified by specific patterns of activities, their only function is to perpetuate their existence and physical forms. Individuals may thus differ among each other with respect to composition and complexity, yet any stronger, metaphysically grounded, idea of specific difference is discarded.⁶ Likewise, human and animal minds are both constituted by complex ideas representing their (complex) bodies; so even the distinction between the human and the animal mind seems to reduce to a matter of different degrees of complexity.

This denial of any specific difference of humans is later corroborated by Spinoza's critique of teleology. In *Erapp*, it is argued that the

3 I have argued for this in Ursula Renz, *The Explainability of Experience. Realism and Subjectivity in Spinoza's Theory of the Human Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), but see also Valtteri Viljanen, *Spinoza's Geometry of Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), who, however, denies that individual essences are the result of efficient causation. Dominik Perler, "Spinozas Theorie der Universalien," *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 70/2 (2016): 163–88, 185, who, too, identifies individual essences with structural features, remains indifferent with respect to their causation.

4 See Dominik Perler, "Spinoza über Tiere," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 96/2 (2014): 232–61, and Margaret Dauler Wilson, *Ideas and Mechanism: Essays on Early Modern Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 178–95.

5 See the passage following E2p13s, C I, 458–62.

6 There is no controversy about this, even though some scholars defend the view that the notion of form still plays an important role in Spinoza; see Pierre-François Moreau, "The Metaphysics of Substance and the Metaphysics of Form," in *Spinoza and the Human Mind: Papers Presented at the Second Jerusalem Conference*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel, 27–36 (Leiden: Brill 1994), 27–36, and François Zourabichvili, *Spinoza und physische de la pensée* (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 2002), 13–49.

anthropomorphic tendency of humans to think of all beings in teleological terms is a side effect of the human inclination to comprehend one's own affections in terms of the ends one aims at (C I, 440–41). In principle, one could judge this tendency as providing us with an important clue for the understanding of living beings in general.⁷ Spinoza, in contrast, claims that such self-comprehension in terms of ends falls short of the real, efficient causes of one's behavior, and must therefore be judged as a vain attempt to compensate for our ignorance. Notably, far from simply voicing an epistemological concern, this claim touches upon the anthropological issue of human nature: the denial that teleological self-comprehension yields adequate knowledge undermines the widespread assumption that it is a specifically human privilege to act on the basis of one's intentions, and, by implication, to have first-personal knowledge of the motives or causes of one's actions.⁸ Spinoza agrees that humans have the habit of reflecting on their behavior in terms of their intentions, yet, by claiming that this habit is a merely compensatory effect of our ignorance, he nonetheless deprives them of any epistemic or action-theoretic privilege. Thus neither in Spinoza's metaphysics nor in his natural philosophy are human beings granted a privileged position: they are simply finite natural beings, comparable to stones, plants, or animals.

On the other hand, however, considering the positions Spinoza advocates with respect to many ethical, societal, and political questions, his philosophy is often, and rightly so I think, perceived as soliciting a remarkably humane attitude toward humanity. This deserves special attention, as the relation Spinoza assumes between humanity and humaneness is itself marked by ambivalence. In fact, although the

7 This has been argued for recently by Michael Thompson; see part 1 of his *Life and Action: Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 25–82. Historically, the second part of Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* played a crucial role.

8 See, famously, Elisabeth Anscombe, *Intention* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957), and for elaboration, part 2 of Thompson, *Life and Action*, 183–46. The locus classicus is Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. Peter Caramello (Rome: Marietti, 1952), II, qq. 8–15.

emotion of human kindness, “humanitas”, is specified in E3p29s, somewhat dismissively, as a subtype of ambition, or striving to please other people (C I, 510), it is later depicted as a source of constancy which is worth striving for (see E4p37s1; C I, 565–56). Moreover, among the virtues Spinoza recommends are attitudes such as benevolence, generosity, charity, and love. However, these are only recommended with respect to humans, not with respect to other animals.⁹ Notably, one can even read Spinoza’s purportedly amoralist metaethics as inviting a particularly humane attitude toward human beings:¹⁰ if one assumes, as Spinoza does, that self-concern structures any sort of striving, then a natural way to help humans lead a good life is to instruct them in how to differentiate between better and worse—that is, rational and benign versus irrational and harmful—manners of being concerned with oneself.

The question is: *how can we make sense of this ambivalent outlook on humankind, which, while denying any special status to humanity on the level of metaphysics and natural philosophy, calls for our special care for human beings in ethics and politics?*

As I shall argue in this essay, we can vindicate Spinoza’s views on humans in a manner that allows for reconciliation of these views’ seemingly opposite tendencies if we reconstruct them as deriving from certain facts about human *existence*. In other words, I shall read Spinoza by means of an interpretive method I sometimes refer to, methodologically, as *hermeneutic existentialism*. With this term I characterize approaches that seek to reconstruct historical views about human affairs as deriving from fundamental assumptions about human existence, rather than from classificatory statements about the difference

9 Not surprisingly, it is on the basis of this scholium that Yitzhak Melamed has charged Spinoza with maintaining “speciesism,” i.e. a species-related sort of chauvinism; see his “Spinoza’s Anti-humanism: An Outline,” in *The Rationalists: Between Tradition and Innovation*, ed. Carlos Fraenkel, Dario Perinetti, and Justin Smith, 147–66 (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 163–64. For critical discussion, see Perler, “Spinoza über Tiere,” 248–59.

10 For the charge that Spinoza’s metaethics are amoralistic see Melamed, “Spinoza’s Anti-humanism,” 158–61.

between human and nonhuman animals. Considering Spinoza's views on humanity, I want to argue that—rather than describing human nature—they are meant to reflect on the concrete lived experience of human beings. This will not only yield a subtle picture of what Spinoza actually thought about humans; we will also get a better grasp of some of his key concepts and principles. All together, I think Spinoza's philosophical views provide us with a lively response to what he thought was at the bottom of most human concerns.

My essay has four parts. Focusing on Spinoza's conception of a species-relative good, the first section elaborates on the specifically human viewpoint. The second section defends an existentialist reading of the conatus doctrine, which presents Spinoza as opposing rather than committing himself to essentialism. The third section examines the equation of perfection with reality that underlies the *Ethics* and discusses its impact both on human experience and on Spinoza's meta-ethical views. I conclude with a few remarks on what a good life for humans might look like according to Spinoza.

HUMAN MOTIVATION: SPINOZA ON THE NOTION OF A SPECIFICALLY HUMAN GOOD

Although Spinoza tends to avoid describing humankind in terms of a species, he does refer to the idea of humanity in an affirmative manner, when he attributes to humans a capacity to conceptualize human life and nature in ideal terms and to sense a desire for complete happiness, blessedness, salvation, or perfection.¹¹ This, notably, is a point which comes up in his thought from his earliest writings, although it is not always described in the same way. So he writes in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*: “but since human weakness does not grasp that order [i.e. the eternal order according to which everything

11 As these terms are all connected in Spinoza, I will use them more or less interchangeably henceforth.

happens] by its own thought, and meanwhile man conceives of a human nature much stronger and more enduring than his own, and at the same time sees that nothing prevents his acquiring such a nature, he is spurred to seek means that will lead him to such a perfection" (C I, 10). Likewise, the whole second part of the *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being* is dedicated to a discussion of "the Perfect Man". What Spinoza has in mind here is not the wholly virtuous human being but the "perfect Man capable of uniting himself to God."¹² Thus, the issue behind the notion of the perfect human being is human blessedness, which may be reached, according to Spinoza, by the acquisition of true knowledge of God.

Furthermore, in a striking example in the *Appendix Containing Metaphysical Thoughts*, where the traditional transcendental concepts "one", "true", and "good" are discussed, we read: "and indeed many . . . things are good, which are not good for all. So salvation is good for man, but neither good nor bad for animals or plants to which it has no relation" (C I, 313). As is clear from this example, there is on the level of the *objects of our desires* a remarkable difference between humans and other creatures. Finally, a similar association of humanity with the generation of ideals of human perfection or salvation is mentioned in E4praef, where humans are ascribed a "desire to form an idea of man, as a model of human nature" (C I, 545), which model alone allows Spinoza to define the vocabulary of good and bad in nonarbitrary way.¹³

All these passages invoke human beings' inclination to think of humanity and human destiny in ideal terms and to desire perfection along the lines of such an ideal, as a distinctive feature of human subjects.

12 This is the title to the second part of the *Short Treatise* as it appears in the register of the chapters which precedes the first part (C I, 60). The title which is given at the beginning of the second book says only "On Man and What Pertains to Him" (C I, 93).

13 For a detailed analysis of this doctrine, see Karolina Hübner, "Spinoza on Being Human and Human Perfection," in *Essays on Spinoza's Ethical Theory*, ed. Matthew J. Kisner and Andrew Youpa, 123–42 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 134–40.

Only humans, and no nonhuman animals, are driven to think of themselves in ideal terms; only humans, and no nonhuman animals, develop a notion of salvation or blessedness; only humans, and no nonhuman animals, have religious hopes or a corresponding ethical ambition that calls for more than the mere satisfaction of one's biological needs. Thus, despite his gradualist approach to the human difference, Spinoza ascribes only to humans a *desire* for a *supreme good* or *perfection* in life. The question is how to make sense of this assumption.

Given the pervasiveness of this theme in Spinoza's writings, I suggest interpreting the assumption of such a human desire as a common motivational background of all his philosophy. Many aspects of Spinoza's thought can be read as attempts either at persuading his readers of a more sober, that is, less enthusiastic, understanding of their own moral aspirations, or at teaching them a better, more realistically grounded way of satisfying this human need. This is quite obvious with respect to the anthropological insights articulated in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, where he seeks to provide his contemporaries with a new understanding of religious life, one that allows for grasping its ambivalent outcomes. Likewise, I would also read Spinoza's theory of affects—which discards the explication of our emotional states in terms of intentions from the outset—as a corrective for superstitious hopes, or, more generally, any kind of wishful thinking generated by our inclination to think of ourselves in teleological terms. Finally, I think that even Spinoza's metaphysics can be seen as responding to this trait of human thought, in two respects. First, it defines the basic categories by which things are classified in a way that forces us to admit both our subordinate metaphysical place in the universe and our irreducible dependency. Second, it establishes an ontological framework that allows us to get a clear grasp of what there is, which in turn helps us see what can and what cannot satisfy our specifically human desire for perfection in life. This all indicates that although the feature of human desire for salvation or perfection is only weakly theorized in Spinoza's writings, it is of great importance to his philosophy.

It remains to be specified what precisely Spinoza claims, when he ascribes to humans, and only to humans, a desire for perfection or salvation, and on what grounds he argues for this claim. It is important to see that although Spinoza stresses the fictional character of the objects of our desire for salvation or perfection, the desire itself is nonetheless a real and ineradicable motive of human behavior; and as such it needs to be taken seriously in both theory and practical life. To see why this is so, note that the ignorance out of which we indulge in teleological considerations is tied up with our ontological state. Being finite entities whose existence is limited in time and space, we are *born* into an environment we do not understand, and we do not understand ourselves either. In other words: being finite entities, we are always *learners* and irreducibly so! Thus although for Spinoza no particular thing or fact is in principle epistemically inaccessible to human understanding, our situation as finite epistemic subjects is nonetheless determined by the fact that there are many things we have to learn before we can know such things or facts.

This mark of human finitude has enormous implications, and it explains in particular the significance Spinoza assigns to cultural phenomena such as language, history, and affective narratives.¹⁴ Although these phenomena play no major role in his epistemology, and are all treated under the heading of imaginative knowledge in the *Ethics*, they are key both for individual learning, biographically, and for the constitution of epistemic communities. Consider the examples he mentions in his discussion of our knowledge from hearsay in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*: the reports of one's date of birth and the identity of one's parents. It is wholly inconceivable how we could ever learn these facts if others did not inform us of them through language.

¹⁴ How deeply entrenched Spinoza's philosophy is in an analysis of these phenomena has been shown in detail by Pierre-François Moreau's seminal study *Spinoza. L'expérience et l'éternité* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994); for the role of language see also Lorenzo Vinciguerra, *Spinoza et le signe. La genèse de l'imagination* (Paris: Vrin, 2005).

Or consider the role assigned to narratives in the constitution of religion in the *Theological-Political Treatise*. While Spinoza adopts a strictly historicist attitude toward the Bible, stressing its merely contextual meaning, he leaves no doubt that, from an anthropological viewpoint, it is natural for humans to cope with realities they fail to understand by invoking narratives.¹⁵

It is thus important to acknowledge that cultural techniques such as language are irreducibly ambivalent assets that may or may not support our epistemic improvement. They allow for both the communication of facts and the accumulation of knowledge on the one hand and the tradition of myth on the other. Given, therefore, that our initial epistemic situation is, as sketched here, essentially one of learning, there is always a danger of backlash. At least on the communal level, processes of enlightenment are reversible, a fact of which Spinoza was clearly aware. Presumably, it is this very same epistemic situation from which the human desire for salvation or perfection originates, according to Spinoza. It explains why this desire is at the same time 9:17 PM *fictional* with respect to its object (or mostly so) and *real* in its power and causal impact.

However, insofar as it is derived from the notion of a *situation*, one due to the finite existence of human subjects, the assumption of such a desire is an existentialist, and not an anthropological, claim: it refers, in other words, to the fact that human existence has a beginning in time and to the implications this has for human subjects. Therefore I think that Spinoza, in ascribing to humans a specific desire for salvation or perfection, does not rely on the notion of some specifically human mental capacity as much as on the insight into the epistemic situation of human beings, out of which the various forms of human life and culture develop. This situation, he assumes, is to be comprehended as one of finite epistemic subjects irreducibly doomed to be learners, which

15 See e.g. chapter 6 of the *Theological-Political Treatise*, C II, 152–64.

entails that human mental and cultural life is marked by opportunities and dangers alike.

AGAINST ESSENTIALISM, OR HOW TO READ THE CONATUS DOCTRINE

In the previous section, I have argued that behind Spinoza's claim of a specifically human striving for salvation or perfection is an existentialist insight. The question might arise whether and how such existentialism is compatible with Spinoza's naturalism, or the rejection of any view that describes human beings in terms of "a dominion within a dominion" (E3praef; C I, 491) in nature.

To address this question, I propose taking a closer look at Spinoza's so-called conatus doctrine. This doctrine is presented in the beginning of part 3 of the *Ethics*, where he develops the theoretical foundations of his theory of emotions. There, he famously points out that "each thing, insofar as it lies in itself, strives to persevere in its being" (E3p6; C I, 498), and this striving next is identified, in the next proposition, with "the actual essence of the thing" (E3p7; C I, 499). Based on this view, Spinoza subsequently puts forward the twofold claim that the mind "strives, for an indefinite duration, to persevere in its being, and that it is conscious of this striving" (E3p9; C I, 499).

At first glance, it may seem as if this doctrine provides evidence *against* the existentialist interpretation of Spinoza I've suggested here, in two respects. First, in both E3p6 and E3p7 the disposition to persevere in its being is explicitly attributed to *each* thing (*unaquaeque res*). Thus, Spinoza clearly abstains from comprehending the striving for perseverance as a specifically human property, and conceives it as a universal ontological feature. Taking this seriously, it seems right to interpret his philosophical approach as a sort of naturalism that attributes all properties such as intentional action, thought, or knowledge—usually considered characteristic of human subjects only—to all finite beings, even though perhaps to a lesser degree.

However, it is important to see that the assumption of such an “incremental naturalism”, as this view has recently been called,¹⁶ does not by itself rule out the adoption of an existentialist stance. To interpret the *Ethics* in existentialist terms only requires that one show how the perspective constituting existentialism can plausibly arise within nature as conceived by Spinoza’s naturalism. I think that the notion of universal applicability of the conatus to all beings, put forward in E3p6, is crucial for this. For this notion suggests that the very same property of being which materializes itself in moving bodies—as the principle of inertia—drives living creatures to strive for survival, whereas in humans that property appears as a desire for salvation or supreme happiness. Given, moreover, what I’ve said in the previous section about the role of language, history, and affective narratives, Spinoza’s approach also contains the conceptual resources to account for the distinct ways in which the conatus of humans materializes itself in different cultures. This shows that, rightly conceived, Spinoza’s naturalism does not undermine the proposed existentialist reading but, on the contrary, corroborates it. Conversely, his naturalism is refined by his existentialism.

There is a second concern, which seems to challenge my view immediately. One may wonder whether the identification of each thing’s conatus with its actual essence, put forward in E3p7, does not show that—far from rehearsing, implicitly as it were, an existentialist position—Spinoza adopts some form of *essentialism*, that is, the view that our striving is the expression of our being driven, even in our most intimate desires, by preestablished facts about our own nature. In the past fifteen years or so, it has in fact become common to read the equation of the conatus with the actual essence of each thing in this vein, and this is certainly no accident.

16 Don Garrett, “Representation and Consciousness in Spinoza’s Naturalistic Theory of the Imagination,” in *Interpreting Spinoza: Critical Essays*, ed. Charles Huenemann, 4–25 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 4.

I doubt that Spinoza's aim behind the aforementioned identification was to advocate essentialism. Consider, for instance, the way this identification is introduced in E3p7. Spinoza is not talking here simply about the thing's *essence* but about its *actual essence*. What this precisely means is controversial, but this much is clear: first, Spinoza is not dealing here with the species-essences of things but with the singular essence of individuals.¹⁷ Second, emphasizing the actuality of this essence, he indicates that the issue is not the ascription of nonactualized possibilities or options to the thing in question. The question at stake is rather how to appropriately comprehend the striving by which any thing perseveres in its being. This striving, Spinoza stipulates, is nothing but what we usually refer to as a thing's actual essence. He thereby undermines any speculation about alternative essences, and this move implies a radical denial of any noninstantiated possibility, suggested, perhaps, by the traditional concept of essence. In any case, Spinoza by no means relies on a conception of actual essences according to which any thing is endowed with a specific striving, or a power to continue existing, in a preestablished manner.

It remains to be specified how this fits with an existentialist interpretation of Spinoza's views about human beings. This question may appear particularly pressing since, by positing that each thing's conatus to persevere in its being is nothing but its actual essence, E3p7 clearly abstains from interpreting our desires as the expression of free choice. By implication, Spinoza's approach clearly refutes the idea some twentieth-century philosophers took to be at the very heart of existentialism: the notion of radical choice, or the idea that decisions are a matter of choosing one's identity. Recall, however, how I've proposed we understand existentialism in the previous section. Existentialism, I said, is an approach that, instead of relying on the assumption of

17 See also Hübner, "Spinoza on Being Human," 128, for a discussion of this view.

specifically human capacities, takes the epistemic situation of humans as finite subjects seriously and regards the necessity of learning as the primary point of departure of any consideration concerning humanity. Defined in this way, existentialism is opposed to the assumption that some features apply to humans just in virtue of their essence, but it does not refute determinism as such. Therefore, to ascribe to Spinoza an implicitly existentialist agenda is not to deny that he affirms determinism but rather to resist the temptation to read essentialism into his conatus doctrine.

That this corresponds in fact to Spinoza's own intention becomes clear if we move on to an analysis of E3p9, the proposition which is the final step in the development of the conatus doctrine. In its entirety, this proposition says:

The mind, both insofar it has clear and distinct and insofar it has confused ideas, strives to persevere in its being for an indefinite duration, and it is conscious of this striving.¹⁸

This proposition affirms that the human mind¹⁹ has a conatus; thus minds, too, strive to persevere in their particular being. It is striking to see, however, how the tendency of the mind's striving is invoked here: what is at stake, is neither the very fact of the mind's striving nor its causes but its direction or object. To say of a mind, Spinoza explicates, that it strives to persevere in its being is to say that it strives to maintain its more or less idiosyncratic constitution—insofar as it consists of a certain set of ideas, whether or not these are clear and distinct or confused—for an indefinite duration. Thus, the claim which Spinoza is advocating here is not that the mind strives to be in

¹⁸ The quoted translation is mine; for the Latin see Spinoza, *Opera*, ed. Carl Gebhardt (Heidelberg: Winters, 1925), vol. 2, 147.

¹⁹ That this proposition is about the human mind is clear from the fact that it relies on E2p23, which in turn relies on E2p19 and E2p11c, which are both, and explicitly, about the human mind.

accordance with a preestablished essence but that it tends to maintain whatsoever constitution it actually has.

By applying the notion of *conatus* to human beings, therefore, Spinoza does not ascribe to humans a specific desire to preserve their human form but simply posits that, just like any other entity, each individual human subject has the tendency to continue existing, for an indefinite duration, in whatever way it actually exists. Despite its first, seemingly essentialist gloss, the doctrine of *conatus* actually favors, rather than opposes, an existentialist reading of Spinoza's anthropological tenets. This, rather than the notion of human essence, is also the ground on which Spinoza's naturalist determinism—that is, the view that we are determined to strive for whatever our appetite suggests to us as a desirable object—rests.

PERFECTION AT WORK: BEING, ITS EXPERIENCE, AND THE PROBLEM OF MORAL JUDGMENT

The question might arise whether the idea of a specific good for humans, or of any meaningful distinction between better and worse ways of living as human beings, is really defensible in Spinoza's framework. How, in other words, can there be such a thing as a Spinozistic ethics, given Spinoza's overall views of nature and humanity?

It is important to see that we are facing not just one but several problems here. First, there is the concern with universality: how can there be statements that hold of *all* humans, given that the only real "essences" for Spinoza are the singular essences of actually existing individuals? Second, there is a moral-psychological issue. Assume, as my antiessentialist reading of the *conatus* has suggested, that subjects are always simply determined to strive to maintain their actual constitution. How then is an improvement of their condition conceivable? Third, there is a metaethical challenge. How, one might wonder, can Spinoza ever say that something is, in a realistic sense of the word, good or bad for people?

Let me begin with a few remarks on the problem of universal moral claims. Note that the reason why this is an issue is Spinoza's nominalist position regarding universals. It has nothing to do with his views on humanity. Therefore, if there is a solution to this problem, it must be found in Spinoza's theory of concepts. And indeed, considering his doctrine of "common notions" on the one hand and his views on the constitution of individual forms in the physical digression on the other, one may come to see how Spinoza can establish and justify claims about types of individual—and thus about all humans—even if the notion of any such type is only an *ens rationis* for him.²⁰

More interesting for the concept of humanity is the moral-psychological problem. At first, it may seem as if there is an easy solution to it. One can assume that changes continuously occur in nature, and this being so, we may expect that, whenever the actual constitution of a thing changes, the aim of its striving also changes. This suggestion points in the right direction—indeed, if the conatus of a thing does not determine it to maintain a specific form but merely to strive for the continuation of its actual constitution, it is plausible to also ascribe to it the tendency to adapt its desires continuously. But this solution relies on an insufficient analysis of the problem. To see why, recall that, according to a long tradition of interpreting Spinoza along Parmenidean lines, neither time nor change can be granted any reality. Trivially, advocates of this Parmenidean interpretation might just say that both the moral-psychological problem itself and its proposed solution derive from an illusory worldview, as there is no change at all for Spinoza.²¹

20 See Hübner, "Spinoza on Being Human," and Perler, "Spinozas Theorie der Universalien," for more detailed discussion of this point.

21 This interpretation has been advocated recently by Michael Della Rocca; see in particular his *Spinoza* (London: Routledge, 2008), and criticized by me; see Renz, *The Explainability of Experience*, as well as Renz, "Finite Subjects in the *Ethics*: Spinoza on Indexical Knowledge, the First Person, and the Individuality of Human Minds," in *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, ed. Michael Della Rocca (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018): 204–19. Note that the proposed solution does not require that one take a position with respect to this interpretive issue.

Unfortunately, this does not yet eliminate the problem. For the problem to arise, it is sufficient that people *think* that change occurs, and it is by no means clear how this thought is accounted for in a Parmenidean reading. This shows that the real challenge is, from the outset, one that arises at the level of *perception* by fallible epistemic subjects, and it also needs to be addressed as such. The task therefore is, first, to show that changes effectuated by some affection are in fact cognized by subjects, and second, to account for the grounds on which change may be experienced by them as either improving or worsening their condition.

To address these concerns, I suggest considering two fundamental principles of Spinoza's philosophy, principles which, I contend, do not just underlie his basic metaphysical framework but also explicate his views on human happiness and excellence. Following a common interpretation, Spinoza—like many rationalists of his time—assumes that all being is generally, and in all its features, intelligible. Now, as I have argued at some length, this is not just an abstract metaphysical claim, corroborating Spinoza's views on what there is (and what there isn't), but it also underlies Spinoza's cognitive psychology, as it is entailed by his views about the imagination.²² Accordingly, it is impossible for Spinoza that we have no epistemic access at all to something that either affects our body as a whole or one of its parts. This does not rule out that our cognizing of these affections is subject to all sorts of distortions; on the contrary, it is hardly ever accurate. But given the principle of intelligibility, there is no fixed limit to our knowing our affections. This does *not*, of course, explain *how* human subjects perceive affections as changes, but it precludes our knowledge of our affections being limited in a way that would amount to a fundamental self-ignorance regarding the changes of our constitution.

22. See my *The Explainability of Experience*, 193, and "Spinozistic Cognitive Psychology: Spinoza's Concept of the Imagination," in *Konzepte der Einbildungskraft in der Philosophie, den Wissenschaften und den Künsten des 18. Jahrhunderts. Udo Thiel zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Rudolf Meer, Giuseppe Motta, and Gideon Stiening (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019).

Let me now come to the second principle mentioned earlier, which, although only rarely discussed, is at least as crucial for my purposes. According to Spinoza's metaphysics, being is always better than non-being. Notably, as Spinoza does not distinguish categorically between things and facts or states of things, this holds not just for things' existence but also for the occurrence of events and processes, and the instantiation of properties by things. As a consequence, it is not just better for things to exist than not to exist, but it is also preferable for a thing to have a feature than not to have it, and to have more features than to have fewer. Traditionally, this principle has been referred to as the principle of plenitude, and it is most often ascribed to Leibniz. Yet, as commentators have recently pointed out, this principle is also foundational for the *Ethics*.²³ Its most explicit expression is perhaps the following definition:

By reality and perfection I understand the same thing. (E2def6;
C I, 447)²⁴

What is perplexing about this definition is that it is not presented together with Spinoza's other metaphysical views in part 1 of the *Ethics* but rather IS stipulated at the beginning of part 2, which develops his theory of the human mind. Why is this so?

I generally presume that many of Spinoza's definitions and axioms, and in particular those introduced in the beginning of part 2 or later, were added fairly late to the text, in order to explicate presumptions

23 See Samuel Newlands, "The Harmony of Spinoza and Leibniz," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 81 (2010), 64–104, in particular 66–76, and Martin Lin, "The Principle of Sufficient Reason," in Della Rocca, *Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, 132–54, 149–51. The locus classicus for this interpretation is Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1936), 144–82.

24 Interpreters often tend to read this as a deflationary definition rather than the expression of commitment to the principle of plenitude. But this does not fit with the way E2def6 is employed. Strikingly, there is no mention of it in parts 2 or 3 at all, but only in E4praef, E5p35d, and E5p40d, and there, it is not at all used in a deflationary manner.

that were initially taken for granted but then needed to be explicated in the course of some later argument.²⁵ Taking the location of E2def6 seriously, we can surmise that the importance Spinoza attributes to the principle of plenitude is in part due to the explanatory role it plays for the understanding of human mental life. Thus, E2def6 is positing not only the metaphysical insight that reality and perfection are one and the same feature of being but also points to a dimension of reality which, Spinoza thinks, expresses itself in our own, human mental life. This entails that it is not only, and perhaps not even primarily, accessible from the standpoint of a divine, infinite intellect.

This presumption is corroborated, if we consider how the notion of perfection is employed in the definition of joy and sadness. These two emotions play a major role for Spinoza's theory of affects: together with desire, or appetite, they form the basic set of the three primary affects, by which the whole emotional life of human beings is determined, and from which all other affects are derived. Spinoza introduces his conception of these two affects in E3p11s, where he concludes from the previous proposition: "we see, then, that the mind can undergo great changes, and pass now to a greater, now to a lesser perfection. These passions, indeed, explain to us the affects of joy and sadness. By joy, therefore, I shall understand in what follows that passion by which the mind passes to greater perfection. And by sadness, that passion by which it passes to a lesser perfection" (C I, 500–501). This definition ingeniously combines psychological and metaphysical features. Describing joy and sadness as transitional phenomena, Spinoza posits that a huge part of the emotions are, psychologically speaking, transitional processes, rather than simply states. As such they only occur in entities that may be subject to change. Yet by invoking the idea of perfection, Spinoza at the same time affirms that experiencing joy or sadness always has a metaphysical dimension. Joy and sadness are those

25 That the principle of plenitude is contained in E1p16 is claimed by both Newlands, "The Harmony of Spinoza and Leibniz," and Lin, "The Principle of Sufficient Reason."

changes to a thing that amount to an increase or decrease in its perfection. To invoke Gilles Deleuze's terminology, one could also say that they express reality.²⁶ This entails that they are both metaphysically grounded and epistemically accessible; any instance of joy or sadness expresses a metaphysical process and thereby discloses it to the subject undergoing it.

This might look strange at first, and far too abstract to capture the nature of such simple emotional phenomena. Read against Spinoza's supposed acceptance of the principle of plenitude, however, the quoted definitions give a plausible and phenomenologically sound analysis of the two passions. What else could joy consist in, metaphysically speaking, if not in the affection constituted by the expression and my notion of there being more goodness, more reality, more perfection in me or present to me? And what else could sadness be than the opposite experience of vanishing reality in me or in something near to me?

More important, Spinoza's descriptions of joy and sadness in terms of felt increase or decrease of perfection shed new light on the relation he assumes between metaphysical truths and human experience. His claim is not just that perfection is a feature of being but also that this is intelligible to humans. Perfection is a dimension of being that is extremely relevant to our existence as finite subjects, as we cognize perfection in virtue of our emotional way of experiencing changes in ourselves. Perhaps some might regret that this is an imperfect and incomplete manner of knowing. And indeed, there are two epistemic restrictions built into the definition of joy and sadness quoted earlier. First, the perfection of a thing is not immediately seen but is only felt indirectly, by comparing the different levels of perfection before and after a change. Second, it is only the changes in one's own perfection that one gets to know by experiencing joy and sadness. Still, given the definitions of sadness and joy, perfection is an intelligible feature of

26 See Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* (New York: Zone Books, 1990), 219–20.

being, and one that is, remarkably, most salient from the perspective of the kind of finite, egocentric, affectionate subjects that we are. To come back to my initial question, we can thus say that Spinoza is in a convenient position for explaining how subjects can perceive changes as improvement. They perceive them that way when they either feel them as enjoyable or associate them with joy or sadness.

Taking perfection—the increase or decrease of which is felt as joy or sadness—as a *real* feature of being, however, relies on presuppositions that seem at odds with that strand of thought in the *Ethics* which seems to commit Spinoza to a radical antirealism about metaethics. This brings us to the third issue mentioned earlier, the question about how the proposed view squares with Spinoza's metaethics.

There is indeed much evidence that seems to justify interpreting Spinoza as postulating an antirealist metaethics. In particular, this evidence seems to contradict the observation from which I started in this essay, namely that Spinoza upholds the idea of a specifically human good. Let me therefore quote this evidence in some detail, before I show how it squares with the understanding I have presented of the notion of perfection. In the preface to part 4, Spinoza claims: “as good and evil are concerned, they also indicate nothing positive in things, considered in themselves, nor are they anything other than modes of thinking, or notions we form because we compare things to one another. For one and the same thing can, at the same time, be good, and bad, and also indifferent. For example, music is good for one who is melancholy, bad for one who is mourning, and neither good nor bad to one who is deaf” (C I, 545). And in E4d1 and E4d2, he stipulates: “by good I shall understand what we certainly know to be useful,” and “by evil, however, I shall understand what we certainly know prevents us from being masters of some good” (C I, 546). How can these passages, where Spinoza obviously advocates an antirealist conception of good and bad, be reconciled with the proposed realist reading of the definition of joy and sadness, and its connection with the principle of plenitude?

My answer, in a nutshell, is this: I assume that Spinoza distinguishes, implicitly, between two ways of thinking the notion of goodness. It is one thing to say that perfection, or goodness, is an intrinsic feature of being. It's another thing to apply the predicates "good" and "bad" to particular things and to classify them as goods or evils. To make the distinction clear, one could say that, in the first case, the idea of goodness is employed in a quasi-adverbial way in order to qualify the basic activity of being, whereas in the second case, "good" and "bad" are used in a derivative manner as evaluative predicates in moral judgment.

This distinction between two ways of thinking about the idea of goodness allows for the thought that there is something good in every single thing simply in virtue of its being. For example, while a lion, insofar as it *is*, is adverbially good, and this means that he really is good, the very same lion is evaluated by humans as bad, and rightly so, since, according to our modes of thinking, we know with certainty that he may threaten our own existence. Still, this judgment has no other foundation than our own mode of thinking and is thus entirely unconnected with the lion's being inherently good. Thus, what I take Spinoza to deny in the quoted passages is *not* the view that there is real goodness in nature.²⁷ On the contrary, given his idea of perfection, he must allow for things to be inherently—or in the terminology just introduced: adverbially—good, and he must even take this as a real feature of their being. But what he does deny is that the objects to which we refer as to the truth-makers of our evaluative statements are inherently good; they are only good insofar as we judge them from our anthropocentric perspective.

To conclude, instead of interpreting Spinoza's metaethics in antirealist terms, we better describe it as an antianthropocentric realism, for there is

27 In ascribing to Spinoza a realistic conception of goodness, I depart from many interpretations of his ethics; see e.g. Matthew J. Kisner, *Spinoza on Human Freedom: Reason, Autonomy and the Good Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 87; or Melamed, "Spinoza's Anti-humanism," 158–61.

real goodness, according to Spinoza. Or, more to point: there is real goodness everywhere in nature. But in order to say of a thing that it is good in its own right, we must resist the temptation to describe it by means of our human conception of it as being either useful or harmful for us.

CONCLUSION: BLESSEDNESS FROM THE HUMAN POINT OF VIEW

It has become clear that despite his dismissal of any *categorical* distinction between human and nonhuman animals and his gradualist approach to the human difference, Spinoza has quite interesting views on humanity and human life. As I argued in the first section, for example, he assumes that only human subjects have a desire for salvation or perfection in life; and this assumption, I've contended, is not derived from the idea of humans' special capacities but from an analysis of the way in which finitude and the necessity of learning shape human life and culture. To corroborate this view, the second section provided an alternative reading of Spinoza's conatus doctrine that, unlike common essentialist readings, squares with the proposed existentialist approach. In the third section, I argued that Spinoza's metaphysical identification of perfection with reality provides him with both the psychological concepts and the metaethical foundation that allow him to defend the notion of substantial ethical distinction between better and worse ways of living as a human being.

The question remains, what a good life for humans consists in, according to Spinoza. In particular, one might want to know what it is that, he thinks, eventually satisfies the human desire for salvation or perfection.

There are no easy answers to these questions. On the one hand, as is obvious from E3praef, Spinoza obviously rejects any moralizing about human desires and affects. Consequently, if, in part 4 of the *Ethics*, he nonetheless posits a couple of ethical principles (see E4p38–73; E4app), these are not meant to specify, in a normative sense, the aims of good human striving but rather to provide general guidelines for a

rational or, more particularly, *useful* conduct.²⁸ These principles are, in other words, merely instrumental maxims for regulating our social or public as well as our private emotional life in the best possible way. Even Spinoza's praise of the value of knowledge is no exception.²⁹ On the other hand, the intellectual love of God, mentioned in places as the ultimate aim of our striving, is described in such terms that it remains unclear what its point of reference is. Not surprisingly, this concept notoriously creates fundamental difficulties for any interpretation. In what follows, I shall nonetheless try to give a few hints that may help us understand how what Spinoza envisages by this notion fits into the views on humanity I've previously discussed.

To begin with, note that it is all about love, or rather a special kind of love. Before I examine what sort of love Spinoza has in mind here, it is worth mentioning what love generally consists in according to the *Ethics*. According to the definition of love established in E3p13s, love is a species of joy, and more precisely joy accompanied with an idea of its presumed cause (C I, 502). What sorts of causes Spinoza is thinking of here does not matter; notably, this is just what is altered in the intellectual love of God. More important though is this: unlike what one might expect from contemporary associations of love with erotic love, Spinoza conceptualizes love as a species not of desire but of joy.³⁰ This is significant because it fits quite nicely with my previous discussion of the role of joy in the human experience of perfection. Apparently, loving God intellectually is a way of seeing and experiencing perfection from the human viewpoint. By saying, therefore, that it is a sort of love that satisfies our desire for salvation, Spinoza is suggesting that

28 See Don Garrett, "Spinoza's Ethical Theory," in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Garrett, 276–314 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 175–79, for an exposition of this passage of the *Ethics*.

29 But see Michael LeBuffe, *From Bondage to Freedom: Spinoza on Human Excellence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 164, for an alternative view.

30 It might seem puzzling, against the background of this observation, that Spinoza goes on in E3p13s to say that "one who loves necessarily strives to have present and preserve the thing he loves" (C I, 502), but note that Spinoza does not derive here love from desire but desire from love.

blessedness is inherent to our lived experience; it is not, in other words, something which transcends our lives.

This said, Spinoza is quite aware of the fact that not just any joy satisfies our human desire for salvation or perfection; some forms of joy can be excessive (E4p43; C I, 570), whereas others, such as sensual pleasure, are not very sustainable (*Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, sec. 5; C I, 8). More needs to be said therefore to show how joy can be a reliable, stable, and sustainable source of happiness. This is where the phrase “intellectual love of God” moves to the fore. Apparently, not all ideas we may form of the cause of our joy yield the right kind of love according to Spinoza but only those ideas that stem from rational insight into the metaphysical structure of the world and the essence of reality.

But why, or how, may such insight yield blessedness? Spinoza’s answer to this question is twofold, I think. On the one hand, eventually, it is in virtue of such an insight that we see through the illusory grounds of common hopes and fears and thus of those affects that prevent us from living in peace and freedom. Metaphysical insight, in other words, may help us relativize our anthropocentric concerns and get rid of much anxiety and conflict. On the other hand this very same insight has an eminently positive outcome. Assume that we have come to understand, and accept, that being humans, we are merely modes, or states of reality, and that out there, beyond our personal viewpoint, reality and perfection exist in abundance. Wouldn’t it be natural to expect that we are pleased, even in the middle of all our sorrows, by this thought? How would this thought, once we really embrace it, *not* make us happy?

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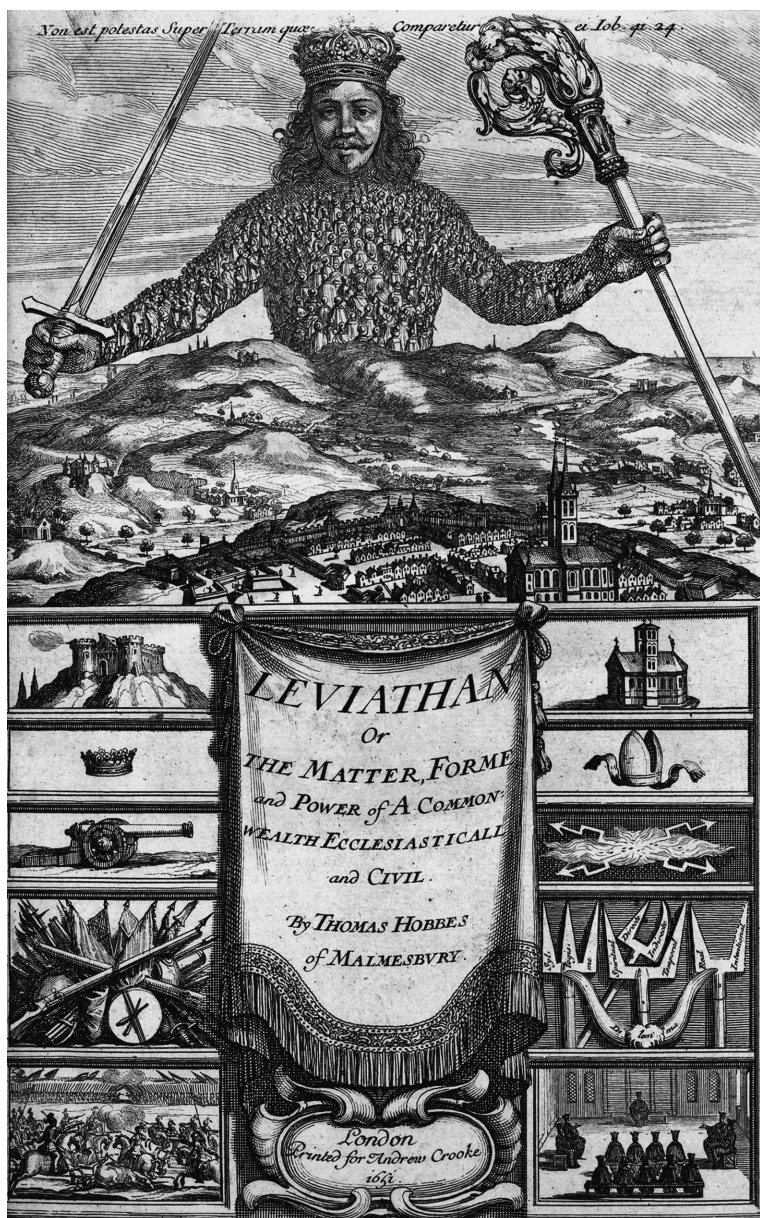


FIGURE 11 Abraham Bosse, frontispiece engraving of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651)

CHAPTER 8

Hobbes and Rousseau on Human Nature and the State of Nature

Ioannis D. Evrigenis

Like most of their predecessors and contemporaries, Thomas Hobbes and Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote primarily of “men” and “hommes.” While French allowed Rousseau to write about “humanité,” in Hobbes’s English works the genus was “mankind.” If these terms gave the impression that Hobbes and Rousseau were interested in men, rather than human beings, their consistent references to “natura humana,” “human nature,” and “nature humaine” made it clear that their subject was the human being and not man, rather than woman. To the ears of subsequent readers, especially our own contemporaries, the language of “man” obscures the degree to which their focus resembled that of Socrates in Plato’s *Republic*, when he acknowledged obvious differences between men and women but noted that some of those differences were irrelevant to an inquiry into human nature (452a–456d). If the language in their works sometimes gives the impression

of narrowness, it is worth remembering that it was intended as broadly as possible.

Beyond working with a suitably broad notion of human nature, Hobbes and Rousseau also employed a broader set of evidence in constructing their cases. Although the practice of looking backwards is often part of any attempt to understand oneself and one's surroundings, Hobbes and Rousseau expanded it to include a broad variety of sources, including scripture, speculative history, anthropology, mythology, and normative standards, as well as what we might nowadays refer to as thought-experiments. Drawing from an overwhelming number of sources and approaches, Hobbes made a new and powerful case for considering the "natural condition of mankind" or "state of nature," or "the condition in which "this our nature hath placed us" (*EL*, I.14.2). Whatever else this meant, it called for an examination of a condition in which human beings were not subject to a common authority that could establish rules and enforce them. Although his discoveries gave rise to a sustained chorus of accusations of misanthropy, they also provided a framework that subsequent theorists of the human condition had to consider and address.¹ Many of his critics, Rousseau included, saw the potential that that framework held for a conception of human beings as equal and free of the various shackles that had been imposed on them over the centuries by despots, religions, and authorities of all kinds.

"HUMANE NATURE"

The Greek historian Thucydides, whom Hobbes admired greatly, famously declared that those who wish to see clearly what has been done, and what "according to the condition of humanity" (κατὰ τὸ

¹ On the reception of Hobbes's political thought, see John Parkin, *Taming the Leviathan: The Reception of the Political and Religious Ideas of Thomas Hobbes in England 1640–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). On Aristotle, see also Deslauriers and Filotas, chapter 2 here.

ἀνθρώπινον) will be done in the future, would find in his history an “everlasting possession.”² That statement was clearly what Hobbes had in mind when he tried to justify his decision to translate Thucydides’s history for the first time from Greek directly into English. In the preface to the readers, Hobbes argued that “the principal and proper work of history being to instruct and enable men, by the knowledge of actions past, to bear themselves prudently in the present and providently towards the future: there is not extant any other (*merely human*) that doth more naturally and fully perform it, than this of my author.” (*The Peloponnesian War*, xxi, emphasis added). In his next publication, a précis of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, Hobbes made significant changes to Aristotle’s original but preserved his conviction that there are certain things which apply to all human beings. Where Aristotle repeatedly used “πάντες” in his opening, Hobbes skipped Aristotle’s famous first line, in which he juxtaposed rhetoric to dialectic, and began his version by claiming: “wee see that all men naturally are able in some sort to *accuse* and *excuse*.”³ As Hobbes would state repeatedly, his interest in these texts was not antiquarian but rather based on the conviction that they could educate his contemporaries about the perils and promise of political rhetoric, a topic that no human being could afford to ignore.⁴ Despite differences in their respective accounts of human nature, these ancient texts shared a basic conception of it as something universal and unchanging, something that had to be understood before any other aspect of human life could be investigated meaningfully.

Sharing this assumption meant that any attempt to provide an alternative theory of any aspect of human life would have to begin by revisiting prevailing assumptions about human nature. Hobbes made many controversial statements about this and other topics, but among

2 Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. Thomas Hobbes, ed. David Grene (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989).

3 [Thomas Hobbes], *A Briefe of the Art of Rhetorique* (London: Andrew Crook, [1637]), I.i.

4 E.g., *Thomae Hobbesii Malmesburiensis Vita* (London: n. p., 1679), 4.

his most controversial were his assertions that human beings are by nature equal and *not* social. Neither of these positions originated with Hobbes; others had argued for variations of one or the other before him. Nevertheless, Hobbes's approach to them gave them a special and lasting prominence, which is particularly important for present purposes. On the surface, these claims were part of Hobbes's sustained attack against Aristotle, whom Hobbes portrayed as the advocate of natural inequality and natural sociability. Careful study of Hobbes's claims about Aristotle, however, shows that he served mainly as the symbol of two intellectual tendencies that Hobbes took exception to: the uncritical reliance on authority and, in particular, that of the scholastic admirers of Aristotle and his Christian followers.⁵ As Hobbes put it in *Leviathan*, "such Opinions as are taken onely upon Credit of Antiquity, are not intrinsically the Judgment of those that cite them, but Words that passe (like gaping) from mouth to mouth."⁶

The solution to this problem was to encourage readers to think for themselves, and Hobbes was especially well situated to do so. The Europeans' conquest of America, the Reformation, and the Scientific Revolution that was unfolding around him had posed profound challenges to the established intellectual order and epistemology, and had opened innumerable new paths through which previously disenfranchised individuals could join in the pursuit, accumulation, and evaluation of knowledge about matters ranging from the trivial to the divine and encompassing everything in between. Hobbes feared that while uncritical reliance on the authority of others entailed the danger of submission to the nefarious designs of self-interested politicians and

5 On Hobbes's relationship to Aristotle and scholasticism, as well as his views regarding the uncritical reliance on authority more generally, see Ioannis D. Evrigenis, *Images of Anarchy: The Rhetoric and Science in Hobbes's State of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

6 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil* (London: Printed for Andrew Crook, 1651), hereafter referred to as "*Leviathan*," Review and Conclusion, 395.

self-proclaimed prophets,⁷ this democratization of knowledge threatened complete anarchy. If all could read the Bible and interpret it for themselves, innumerable competing interpretations could emerge.⁸ Even more threatening, however, was the possibility that those who had been thus emancipated and invited to rethink everything they had been told would sooner or later come to the conclusion that they had the right to also rethink the laws under which they lived and the authority of those who imposed them. Hobbes's task, therefore, was to strike a balance between complete dependence on authority and complete self-reliance. Doing so was not an easy task, for to achieve that balance he had to make use of several dangerous, and often competing, elements of human nature.

EQUALITY AND SOCIABILITY

From his earliest *Elements of Law*, Hobbes had insisted that the natural state of human beings was one of equality, not because we were all literally equal, but because "if we consider how little odds there is of strength or knowledge between men of mature age, and with how great facility he that is the weaker in strength or in wit, or in both, may utterly destroy the power of the stronger, since there needeth but little force to the taking away of a man's life; we may conclude that men considered in mere nature, ought to admit amongst themselves equality; and that he that claimeth no more, may be esteemed moderate."⁹ In other words, whatever differences there may be between one human being's strength or knowledge and another's, they are not sufficient to

7 Hobbes warned of this danger explicitly in *De Cive*. See Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, trans. Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), hereafter referred to as "DC," (Preface, secs. 20–21).

8 See, e.g., Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth or the Long Parliament*, ed. Paul Seaward (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 2010), hereafter referred to as "*Behemoth*," 134–35.

9 Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, ed. Ferdinand Tönnies, second ed. with an introduction by M. M. Goldsmith (London: Frank Cass, 1969), hereafter referred to as "*EL*," I.14.2.

protect the stronger or more knowledgeable from his lesser counterpart reliably and in a lasting manner. Equally important, however, is the observation that human beings tend to overlook this basic equality, because it is one that they *ought* to acknowledge but seldom do. Thus, although there are some who fit Hobbes's description of moderation, the existence of some who do not makes for a volatile and dangerous environment. This is the first sign of vainglory, a human trait that would eventually rise to prominence in Hobbes's works, culminating in his naming the final version of his political theory *Leviathan*, after the king over the children of pride.¹⁰ A universal tendency toward unwarranted pride, coupled with a susceptibility to rhetoric, is liable to make human beings unsociable.

Hobbes did not address the issue of sociability directly in the *Elements*. In *De Cive*, however, he gave it pride of place. Before turning to consider whether or not human beings were equal, Hobbes proposed to show that “*the beginning of civil society is from mutual fear*” (*DC*, I.2). That polemical pronouncement was followed immediately by an inflammatory dismissal of the “majority of previous writers on public Affairs [who] either assume or seek to prove or simply assert that [a human being] is an animal born fit for Society,—in the Greek phrase, Ζῶον πολιτικόν” (*DC*, I.2). As the statement makes clear, the target is not simply Aristotle, who most famously made that statement in his *Politics*, but rather those who follow him, especially those who do so uncritically.¹¹ Proclaiming the axiomatic description of

10 At the top of the frontispiece of *Leviathan*, there is a slight paraphrase of Job 41:24 (Vulgate). In the next verse, Leviathan is described as “*rex super universos filios superbiae*” (Job 41:25).

11 Hobbes reverses Aristotle's order (*Politics*, 1253a3). As Hobbes makes clear in several of his works, he considers Aristotle as in a separate class from his imitators (see, e.g., Thomas Hobbes, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed. Patricia Springborg, Patricia Stablein, and Paul Wilson (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2008), 405–10; Appendix to the Latin *Leviathan* [*Thomae Hobbes Mamesburiensis Opera Philosophica quae Latine Scripsit Omnia, etc.*, ed. William Molesworth, 5 vols. (London: John Bohn, 1839–45), III: 540]; Thomas Hobbes, *De Homine*, 11.9 in *Man and Citizen (De Homine and De Cive)*, ed. Bernard Gert (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991); *Leviathan*, Review and Conclusion, 395.

a human being as an animal born fit for society false, Hobbes proceeded to explain that the error resulted “from a superficial view of human nature” (*DC*, I.2). For Hobbes, closer observation of human interaction in fact reveals that it is self-interest, rather than love of human beings qua human beings, that brings them together. If such a love existed, why would one not love all human beings but rather prefer to associate with those who are more prestigious or useful to oneself? Hobbes insisted that it was self-interest or vainglory that characterized human interactions, but it is important to note that his examples highlighted the latter, focusing on the tendency of human beings to keep up or surpass others in wit and stories.¹² Thus, concluded Hobbes, it is very clear “from experience to anyone who gives any serious attention to human behavior, that every voluntary encounter is a product either of mutual need or of the pursuit of glory” (*DC*, I.2). The problem with these motives, however, is that they cannot form the basis of a “large or lasting society,” because glory is a zero-sum game, consisting in “comparison and preeminence” (*DC*, I.2). Hobbes conceded that the help of others can increase the advantages of life but pointed out that domination was a much more effective way of securing that help than voluntary assistance. If fear were removed, human beings would try to dominate others. As things stand, it was their fear of one another that gave rise to “large and lasting societies” (*DC*, I.2).

Acknowledging that the very existence of societies all around him would prompt a reader to doubt his assertion, Hobbes conceded that “*we seek each other’s company at the prompting of nature*” but added that the kinds of associations which emerge from such natural inclinations are “mere gatherings” rather than alliances based on good faith and

12. Hobbes’s final example, the gatherings of philosophers, is especially telling: there, he argued, “everyone lectures everyone else, in fact everyone wants to be thought a Master; otherwise, not only do they fail, like other men, to love their companions, they actively pursue their resentments against them” (*DC*, I.2).

agreements (*DC*, I.2). Infants are born unaware of the benefits of society, and since all human beings began life as infants, human beings are “*born unfit for society*” (*DC*, I.2, note: “Born fit”). It is not nature, Hobbes argued, but training that renders human beings fit for society.

Hobbes also expanded on the provocative claim that society was based on mutual fear. It is worth noting that among the many sensibilities that such a statement would have offended, not least were those of a broad spectrum of Christian believers, for whom humans were made by God as good and sociable creatures.¹³ Hobbes’s defense here was that “fear” refers not merely to the state of being “actually frightened” but also to “any anticipation of future evil,” adding that “not only flight, but also distrust, suspicion, precaution and provision against fear are all characteristic of men who are afraid” (*DC*, I.2, note: “In men’s mutual fear”). To demonstrate that this is not an idiosyncratic understanding of fear, Hobbes pointed to common human practices, such as locking one’s doors, arming oneself before traveling, and the various defensive measures that countries take vis-à-vis one another.

With a brief argument for equality centered on vulnerability, Hobbes painted a bleak picture of the natural condition of mankind as one in which individuals are diffident but nevertheless engage in conflict with one another in competition for scarce resources and disagreement. Defining a right as the liberty that one has to use “his natural faculties in accordance with right reason,” Hobbes concluded that human beings have a natural right to protect their lives and limbs as best they can (*DC*, I.7). Because a right to an end is meaningless without a right to the means, individuals also have the right to anything and any action conducive to their self-preservation (*DC*, I.8), and each individual alone is the judge of what that is (*DC*, I.9). If absolute freedom to judge and absolute access to anything sound appealing in the abstract, they are far less so when they apply to every single

13 The basic compatibility of this view with a superficial reading of Aristotle’s famous pronouncement accounts, in part, for the appeal of the philosopher among Christian theologians.

individual. As Hobbes put it, a situation in which one attacks by right and another resists by right, and in which it is difficult to amass any satisfactory force for one's defense, will be one of perpetual war. Faced with such a situation, human beings have two options: to try to escape it by seeking peace, or to seek assistance for war, where peace cannot be had (*DC*, I.15).

REASON AND PASSION

From the very first line of the *Elements of Law* to the Review and Conclusion of *Leviathan*, Hobbes focused his attention on the interaction between the "two principal parts of [human] nature, Reason and Passion" (*EL*, Epistle Dedicatory, xv). In so doing, he was simultaneously taking advantage of a long-standing tendency to treat reason and passion as opposites *and* challenging that opposition, by pointing to their inescapable cooperation. For instance, the passions identify the object of one's appetite or aversion, and reason devises the means by which something can be attained or avoided.¹⁴ Or reason surveys the advantages and disadvantages of alternative ends and prizes one over another as more conducive to the individual's long-term interests. In outlining his theory for the Earl of Newcastle, in the Epistle Dedicatory to the *Elements*, however, Hobbes appeared to espouse a completely different view. Therein, reason and the passions stood at the head of two domains in opposition to one another, an opposition that would frame Hobbes's theory of human nature as developed in the rest of the work. The purpose of that opposition was to contrast two fundamentally different worlds, one of disorder and another of order, in such a way as to make a reasonable reader acknowledge how much more preferable the latter is to the former. As even the briefest sketch

14 A notable example can be found in *Leviathan* 13 (63), where Hobbes lists three passions that dispose human beings toward peace and argues that reason provides the articles of peace (through the law of nature) that can satisfy them.

of Hobbes's contrast shows, however, the respective images of the two conditions that he drew were exaggerated. They were parts of a larger exercise intended to take advantage of the very attributes of human nature that Thucydides and Aristotle had focused on, namely vainglory and susceptibility to rhetoric, the qualities that allow one to become persuaded.

That Hobbes's contrast is exaggerated becomes apparent immediately. Reason and passion both lead to a kind of learning: reason gives rise to the "mathematical," while passion yields the "dogmatical" (*EL*, Epistle Dedicatory, xv). Reason, argued Hobbes, "is free from controversies and dispute," while in passion "there is nothing not disputable" (*EL*, Epistle Dedicatory, xv). To impose order on passion, he proposed "first to put such principles down for a foundation, as passion not mistrusting, may not seek to displace; and afterward to build thereon the truth of cases in the law of nature . . . by degrees, till the whole be inexpugnable" (*EL*, xv). At first glance, this statement of method sounds as though it confirms the rigid opposition between passion and reason. The important point, however, is that passion cannot be eliminated from the equation: it needs to be neutralized, if not enlisted, so as to pave the way for persuasion on the basis of reason.

To achieve this kind of persuasion, one must avoid the common mistake of moral philosophers, which is to try to persuade their audiences by talking down to them and by supporting their arguments with references to authorities.¹⁵ Rather, one ought to do what Thucydides, Aristotle, and others pointed out, something that Hobbes experienced firsthand in his encounter with Euclid's method: enlist the reader and turn him into a witness.¹⁶ Hobbes's emphasis on vainglory suggests why: that passion interferes by causing one to refuse to acknowledge others as one's equals, especially in matters of judgment.¹⁷ To disarm

¹⁵ See, e.g., *Leviathan*, 4: 15.

¹⁶ See Evrigenis, *Images of Anarchy*, 23, 44–59, 248–56.

¹⁷ See, e.g., *EL*, I.14.3; see *Leviathan*, 13: 60–61.

this passion, Hobbes built a stark, hyperbolic contrast between the world of reason and that of the passions, and presented the reader with a choice between a secure, commodious life and an anxious, destitute existence.¹⁸ What reasonable, self-interested individual would choose the latter over the former? Who would prefer to declare himself on the side of dogma, rather than reason?

Sharpened over a decade, these appeals found their most potent formulation in *Leviathan*, whose opening word is "Nature." As the famous frontispiece of that work announced, human nature had been given new prominence in this version of Hobbes's theory, for human nature was now linked to the nature of a commonwealth. Using the old metaphor of the body politic but giving it new dimensions, Hobbes introduced his treatise to the reader by means of a rich analogy between man and that "great LEVIATHAN called a COMMON-WEALTH, or STATE, (in latine CIVITAS) which is but an Artificiall Man; though of greater stature and strength than the Naturall, for whose protection and defence it was intended" (*Leviathan*, Introduction, 1). An extended correlation of the parts of the human body to the parts of the commonwealth yields a rich and complex image of both:

Sovereignty is an Artificiall *Soul*, as giving life and motion to the whole body; The *Magistrates*, and other *Officers* of Judicature and Execution, artificiall *Joynts*; *Reward* and *Punishment* (by which fastned to the seate of the Sovereignty, every joynt and member is moved to performe his duty) are the *Nerves*, that do the same in the Body Naturall; The *Wealth* and *Riches* of all the particular members, are the *Strength*; *Salus Populi* (the *peoples safety*) its *Businesse*; *Counsellors*, by whom all things needful for it to know, are suggested unto it, are the *Memory*; *Equity* and *Lawes*, an artificiall *Reason* and

¹⁸ See, especially, the contrast between the gifts that the mathematicians have bestowed upon mankind and the barren existence of the "savage" inhabitants of America (*EL*, I.13.3).

Will; Concord, Health; Sedition, Sicknesse; and Civill war, Death. Lastly, the Pacts and Covenants, by which the parts of this Body Politique were at first made, set together, and united, resemble that *Fiat*, or the *Let us make man*, pronounced by God in the Creation. (*Leviathan*, Introduction, 1)

Hobbes was keenly aware of the difficulties inherent in this parallel. In outlining the book, he explained that to describe the nature of the artificial human, he would first look at human beings, who were simultaneously its matter *and* artificer (*Leviathan*, Introduction, 2).

To do so, he argued, one had to interpret correctly the much-misunderstood *nosce teipsum* (know thyself, which Hobbes rendered “*Read thy self*”), which holds the key to human nature, insofar as it reveals the important difference between the passions and their objects. When one considers what one does when one “does *think, opine, reason, hope, feare, &c.*, and upon what grounds; he shall thereby read and know, what are the thoughts, and Passions of all other men, upon the like occasions” (*Leviathan*, Introduction, 2). Individual constitutions, different environments, upbringings, and educations will make for very different *objects* of those passions, which are also easy to conceal. Thus, while it may be hard to predict what any single individual would prefer to eat or drink, one should expect that all human beings will feel hunger and thirst. Coming to know the thoughts and passions of all other human beings is far from easy. The more one attempts to generalize—that is, move away from oneself and one’s limited acquaintances—the harder the job becomes. Yet that is precisely what one who wishes “to govern a whole Nation,” must do, that is, “read in himself, not this, or that particular man; but Man-kind: which though it be hard to do, harder than to learn any Language, or Science” is nevertheless possible through Hobbes’s groundwork (*Leviathan*, Introduction, 2).

Hobbes’s wager was that an individual who considered his depiction of human nature in private would concur with his portrayal of it and

thus come to accept his recommendations. His direct appeal to an individual reader is a crucial part of his method, because it took seriously the reader's vainglory in at least three important ways. First, the illusion of a private encounter allows the reader to feel as though he has the confidence of the author. Second, that illusion provides a space in which he can admit things that he might be reluctant to admit publicly, as well as an opportunity for the author and reader to agree that certain negative judgments apply not to them but to other human beings. For instance, when Hobbes declares that human beings are not evil in toto but that one takes precautions because one cannot tell the good and evil apart, a reader can concur that yes, there are some others out there who are indeed evil, without any necessary implication for her own moral standing. Third, by inviting the reader to consider, judge, and approve his reading of human nature, Hobbes was building upon the foundation laid by the Reformation and the Scientific Revolution, which had invited individuals to do something equivalent. One could interpret those developments as challenges to established authorities, but viewed from the other side they also represented a promotion of the authority of previously disenfranchised individuals.

That these considerations were on Hobbes's mind is made clear by the ways in which his argument for equality emerged in its final version. Alongside the previous case for equality on the basis of vulnerability, he added a new, much longer argument for equality in the faculties of the mind. He argued that if one set aside skills in science, which only a few possessed anyway, human beings were more nearly equal when it came to the mind than in regard to strength. He contended that, *ceteris paribus*, human beings will acquire the same amount of experience in the same amount of time and with the same amount of effort and, hence, come to possess the same amount of prudence. If one found this hard to believe, it would be because of

a vain conceipt of ones owne wisdome, which almost all men think they have in a greater degree, than the Vulgar; that is, than all men

but themselves, and a few others, whom by Fame, or for concurring with themselves, they approve. For such is the nature of men, that howsoever they may acknowledge many others to be more witty, or more eloquent, or more learned; Yet they will hardly believe there be many so wise as themselves: For they see their own wit at hand, and other mens at a distance. But this proveth rather that men are in that point equall, than unequall. For there is not ordinarily a greater signe of the equall distribution of any thing, than that every man is contented with his share. (*Leviathan*, 13: 61)

The tongue-in-cheek remark at the end should not obscure the serious observations that precede it, which accord fully with the idea that Hobbes is addressing the children of pride. At issue is not whether one will acknowledge that someone else is a superior expert in biology or horticulture but whether anyone else's view about good and evil is superior to one's own. That, it seems, is the first barrier that passion puts before reason, and that Hobbes's direct, individual appeal is intended to overcome.

A second barrier is posed by "a generall inclination of all mankind, a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth onely in Death" (*Leviathan*, 11: 47). This trait, which Hobbes enlisted in order to defend his polemical rejection of any *finnis ultimus* or summum bonum "as is spoken of in the Books of the old Morall Philosophers" (*Leviathan*, 11: 47). Altogether too often, that rejection is interpreted as a declaration of relativism, yet it is anything but that. The point is rather that one can never satisfy one's desires for perpetuity, or secure the means of present satisfaction for the future. This worry about the future is so fundamental and profound a human characteristic that it leads to the establishment of religion, something that is found "in Man onely, . . . not in other Living creatures," because human beings are marked by a "perpetuall solicitude of the time to come" (*Leviathan*, 12: 52). Moreover, as the distinction between the passions and their objects in the Introduction made clear, different

individuals will identify different ends to satisfy their similar passions. These differences mean that one cannot reasonably expect any single good to satisfy everyone. The former two, however, are far more problematic, because they identify the source of competition over resources. Chapter 13 unfolds the rest of the story: equality makes for diffidence, which in turn leads to war. During the condition of uncertainty that such a war entails, no pursuit requiring attention, time, and industry can take place, since worry for one's safety is the primary concern. To make matters worse, any achievement is likely to attract the unwanted attention of others, and thereby put one in even greater danger. The results are notorious: without a common power that can keep all in awe, there is only "continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short" (*Leviathan*, 13: 62). Hobbes argued that three passions incline human beings in such a condition toward peace: fear of violent death, desire of commodious living, and the hope that through one's industry one can obtain the means thereto. Reason, in the form of the law of nature, suggests the steps that can bring about peace (*Leviathan*, 13: 63).

In *De Homine*, when Hobbes enumerated the advantages of language, another trait particular to humans, he counted among them the ability to engage in science, to teach and communicate, and—most important—to issue and understand commands. Without language, he argued,

there would be no society among men, no peace, and consequently no disciplines; but first savagery, then solitude, and for dwellings, caves. For though among certain animals there are seeming polities, these are not of sufficiently great moment for living well; hence they merit not our consideration; and they are largely found among defenseless animals, not in need of many things; in which number man is not included; for just as swords and guns, the weapons of men, surpass the weapons of brute animals (horns, teeth, and stings), so man surpasseth in rapacity and cruelty the wolves, bears, and snakes that are not rapacious unless hungry and not cruel

unless provoked, whereas man is famished even by future hunger.
(*De Homine*, 10.3)

Language can thus produce the greatest benefits for human beings, but it can also produce the greatest harms by rendering them “hostile to the conditions of society and peace” (*De Homine*, 10.3).

ROUSSEAU’S BATTLE AGAINST MISANTHROPY

In the Introduction to *Leviathan*, Hobbes invoked *nosce teipsum* as the crucial, if misunderstood, precept that could give insight into human nature. He did so in the context of an extended analogy that put human beings as creators of a mortal god (the commonwealth) on the other side of God, the creator of human beings. These two themes marked the beginning of Rousseau’s response in the “Second Discourse,” which Rousseau opened by imitating Hobbes in decrying the state of knowledge of human nature.¹⁹ The Academy of Dijon had invited attempts to locate the origin of inequality, and in response Rousseau declared it impossible to do so without knowing the human being, something that could only be done by heeding the inscription at the Temple of Delphi,²⁰ which “alone contained a more important and more difficult Precept than all the big Books of the Moralists” (SD, Preface, sec. 1). The difficulty in discovering “man” “as nature formed him,” according to Rousseau, lay in the changes that “circumstances and progress” had brought about in his constitution, rendering him

like the statue of Glaucus which time, sea, and storms had so disfigured that it less resembled a God than a ferocious Beast, the human

19 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality among Men*, in *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), hereafter referred to as “SD.”

20 “Γνώθι σαυτὸν [*nosce teipsum*]” (e.g., Plato, *Protagoras*, 343b2–3). See Starobinski’s notes in Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, 5 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1959–95), III: 1293–94.

soul altered in the lap of society by a thousand forever recurring causes, by the acquisition of a mass of knowledge and errors, by the changes that have taken place in the constitution of Bodies, and by the continual impact of the passions, has, so to speak, changed in appearance to the point of being almost unrecognizable; and instead of a being always acting on certain and unvarying Principles, instead of the Celestial and majestic simplicity its Author had imprinted on it, all one finds is the deformed contrast of passion that believes it reasons and the understanding that hallucinates. (SD, Preface, sec. 1)²¹

Beyond exemplifying the degeneration that Rousseau had in mind, the image of Glaucus conveyed two important facts about human beings.²² Just as Hobbes's analogy had pointed to the duality of human beings as both the objects of creation and creators, Rousseau's image of the *statue* of Glaucus centered on a mortal who became a God and degenerated into a monstrosity. The trinity of monster, human, God also calls to mind Aristotle's description of human beings as political animals, the statement which Hobbes had used as the symbol of those he sought to refute. According to that definition, human beings are an animal of the polis because of our dependence on others, as only beasts and gods can live on their own (*Politics*, 1253a1–29). The connection between the Second Discourse and Aristotle's *Politics* is not limited to faint traces, however. Rousseau drew it himself when he placed on the frontispiece of the Second Discourse Aristotle's claim that in order to observe what is by nature, one should look not at what is corrupted but at that which is in accordance with nature.²³

In Aristotle's sense, the nature of something includes a conception of its purpose or end, so as to allow us to understand its potential. In

²¹ See Plato, *Republic*, 611c6–d6.

²² On Rousseau's reference to Glaucus, see Christopher Kelly, "Rousseau's 'Peut-être': Reflections on the Status of the State of Nature," *Modern Intellectual History* 3 (2006): 75–83, 80–82.

²³ The original reads "*Non in depravatis, sed in his que bene secundum naturam se habent, considerandum est quid sit naturale*" (*Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, 111; see Aristotle, *Politics*, 1254a36–7). See also Gourevitch's note (351).

the *Politics*, for instance, Aristotle explains that while it will be useful to look at actual constitutions, it will also be necessary to consider ideal ones, such as Plato's *Republic* (*Politics*, 1260b27–36). Rousseau's clue here is thus important, because it signals that in some sense his treatment of human beings will be based on a teleology. Indeed, in a notorious passage a little bit later, Rousseau declared it “no light undertaking to disentangle what is original from what is artificial in man's present Nature, and to know accurately a state which no longer exists, which perhaps never did exist, which probably never will exist, and about which it is nevertheless necessary to have exact Notions in order accurately to judge of our present state” (SD, Preface, sec. 4). At the same time, Rousseau's language and imagery—his allusions and references to the creation, the state of nature, and the moral philosophers' speculative histories, for instance—indicated that he had not given up wholly on the idea that there was an earlier point in time at which it was possible to discern human nature clearly (see, e.g., SD, Exordium; I sec. 47). The overarching challenge, then, was to use a point of origin and a *telos* in order to construct an idea of human nature. The stakes were extremely high, because our conceptions of right and natural right depended on our conception of human nature.²⁴

As Hobbes had done before him, Rousseau dismissed prior efforts to define and explain natural law as failures for having yielded concepts too complex to be understood by the beings that law supposedly binds. Natural law, he argued, must be intelligible to human beings and in accordance with their will, so that they can “submit to it knowingly”; it must also speak “immediately with the voice of nature” (SD, Preface, sec. 8). To succeed where his predecessors had failed, Rousseau proposed to begin with the “first and simplest operations of the human soul” (SD, Preface, sec. 9). In *De Cive*, Hobbes had recommended the same method, but once he had descended into the darkest depths of

24 Rousseau attributes this view to Burlamaqui (SD, Preface, sec. 5).

doubt and wondered about the origin of justice, he asked himself how it happened that human beings began to claim things as their property. Thus, he discovered “*two absolutely certain postulates of human nature, one, the postulate of human greed by which each man insists upon his own private use of common property; the other, the postulate of natural reason, by which each man strives to avoid violent death as the supreme evil in nature*” (DC, Epistle Dedicatory, sec. 10). Instead, Rousseau saw two different principles, “prior to reason, of which one interests us intensely in our well-being and our self-preservation, and the other inspires in us a natural repugnance to seeing any sentient Being, and especially any being like ourselves, perish or suffer” (SD, Preface, sec. 9). The contrast between the two accounts appears stark, yet it is worth noting that Rousseau followed Hobbes in declaring that he was thereby able to extract all the rules of natural right without having to introduce the element of natural sociability into the equation. Moral philosophers had been able to reach similar conclusions only through unnecessary contortions,²⁵ yet nature’s lesson was clear: so long as a human being’s own preservation was not in question, she would not harm one of her kind or even a being of a different species. Awareness of these principles and adherence to them distinguish human beings from animals as regards natural law. Through enlightenment and freedom, human beings can recognize and be bound by natural law, whereas animals cannot. That does not mean, however, that animals do not have natural rights and that human beings do not have certain duties toward them, because the standard for natural rights is not that a being be rational but that it be sentient (SD, Preface, sec. 10; see I sec. 16).

Observing human society led Rousseau to the realization that there is a big difference between what God willed in creating human beings and what human artifice has brought about. To discover the former state, he proposed to “begin by setting aside the facts,” for it was the

²⁵ Rousseau’s general references and allusions are not always easy to decipher, but Gourevitch offers helpful starting points in his notes to the Second Discourse (353–56).

facts that had prevented the moral philosophers and theologians from discovering it (SD, Exordium, sec. 6). The moral philosophers failed because they never went back far enough in their attempts to describe the state of nature. Having failed to strip away human traits that were the result of society, they depicted social human beings, rather than natural human beings. The theologians on the other hand used Genesis—in particular, original sin—to defend inequality. Both tendencies painted human beings in a negative light: as beings who were evil and self-centered, and whose plight was a result of their depravity. Instead, Rousseau proposed to look at “man . . . as he must have issued from the hands of Nature” (SD, I sec. 2). The teleological element of Rousseau’s method meant that he was considering a human being in his present, fully formed state. Not as strong or agile as others, that being is nevertheless overall “the most advantageously organized of all,” not least, it seems, because his needs are few and easy to satisfy (SD, I sec. 2). Continuing a theme that he had developed in the First Discourse, Rousseau completed his description of the physical side of natural human beings by declaring them healthy and strong.

Turning to the metaphysical and moral side of human beings, Rousseau continues the contrast between them and beasts. Beasts, he argues, are driven completely by nature, whereas human beings are free agents (SD, I sec. 15). This property is crucial, because it changes the way a being responds to a stimulus. All sentient beings form ideas from stimuli, even if humans do so to a far greater degree than animals. The key difference is that whereas beasts simply obey nature’s commands in response to a stimulus, the human being recognizes that he has the ability to decide, “and it is mainly in the consciousness of this freedom that the spirituality of his soul exhibits itself” (SD, I sec. 16). In an apparent jab at Hobbes, Rousseau thus concludes that choice and “the sentiment of this power” contain “purely spiritual acts about which nothing is explained by the Laws of Mechanics” (SD, I sec. 16). The characteristic that Rousseau locates at the center of the contrast between beast and human being, however, is the perfectibility of the

human being, which in Rousseau's eyes eventually renders humans stupider and baser than the animals, by turning humans into their "own and Nature's tyrant" (SD, I sec. 17). In addition to highlighting Rousseau's paradoxical view of perfectibility as a process that leads to deterioration, this observation allowed him the opportunity to provide a further clue to his conception of natural human beings. In a long note that he added to the passage, Rousseau declared: "men are wicked; a sad and constant experience makes proof unnecessary; yet man is naturally good, I believe I have proved it" (SD, Note IX sec. 2). As his chastisement of other theorists of the state of nature showed, Rousseau was interested first and foremost in depicting a solitary human being, prior to the formation of society. His differentiation between human *beings* and a human *being* is a crucial reminder of the importance of teleology in his method and further evidence of his effort to correct the misanthropic accounts of humanity of the moral philosophers and theologians that had formed the foundation of inequality and oppression. These ills, according to Rousseau, are the products of society.

The remainder of Rousseau's account of the metaphysical and moral side of human beings bears this hypothesis out. Simple desires that were easy to satisfy meant that natural human beings had no need to reason (SD, I sec. 19, 33). Absence of reason and a lack of interaction with others meant that there would have been no need of language either, which could only have emerged with the first society, the family (SD, I secs. 24–32).²⁶ These steps make the next one less surprising than it might have been on its own: lacking these attributes, natural human beings must have been amoral, rather than naturally wicked, as Hobbes had suggested,²⁷ since they must have lacked any sense of good or evil (SD, I sec. 35).

²⁶ See Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, chaps. 8, 9, in *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. Gourevitch.

²⁷ Although understandable and widespread, this characterization of Hobbes's view of the matter is nevertheless mistaken. Hobbes addressed the issue in *De Cive* and rejected the charge explicitly (Preface, sec. 12).

Rousseau also charged Hobbes with a failure to notice the role that pity plays in softening human vanity and concern with our preservation and well-being. Here, Rousseau seized the opportunity to provide a distinction that reinforced the sharp contrast between presocial and social human beings that he had been eager to establish. Self-love and vanity may sound similar, but Rousseau saw them as fundamentally different. The former is “a natural sentiment which inclines every animal to attend to its self-preservation and which, guided by reason and modified by pity, produces humanity and virtue” (SD, Note XV). *Amour propre*, or vanity, on the other hand “is only a relative sentiment, factitious, and born in society, which inclines every individual to set greater store by himself than by anyone else, inspires men with all the evils they do one another, and is the genuine source of honor” (SD, Note XV). Unaffected by vanity, natural man was more amenable to the salutary effects of pity, a natural sentiment that weakens as reason strengthens.

The contrast between parts 1 and 2 of the Second Discourse is striking. Signaling an approach different from the hypothetical that had driven the first part, Rousseau now made it clear that he was firmly in the domain of anthropology, the realm of time (e.g., SD, II sec. 10: “I cover multitudes of Centuries in a flash”). In place of abundant and easy-to-reach resources and an otherwise indifferent environment, natural human beings now found fruits that were hard to reach and beasts that were far from friendly. The uneventful scene of part 1 gave way to natural phenomena that drove human beings away from certain places and in closer proximity to one another, giving rise to the first societies. In their early stages, those small gatherings went beyond the more efficient satisfaction of the basic human needs, by providing some of the best effects of society and rendering this epoch, all-in-all, “the best” for human beings (SD, II sec. 18). The more individuals became aware of others and began to compare themselves to them, however, the worse this condition became. The development of *amour propre* began to divert their attention away from the dictates of nature and toward the

satisfaction of needs that were superfluous, if not destructive, and that not long thereafter led to humans' enslavement (SD, II sec. 27). The rise of industry and property fueled amour propre and its attendant needs further, and thus set humanity on its way to inequality and, eventually, despotism. Although Rousseau considered the first steps of this process also parts of the state of nature (e.g., SD, II sec. 1), he nevertheless distinguished between the "nascent" human beings of part 1 and the more recognizable beings he had turned to in part 2 (SD, II sec. 3).

What, then, was the purpose of part 1? Rousseau's Aristotelian epigram calls to mind the recommendation from the *Nicomachean Ethics* to use the good in ordering our lives in the same way that the archer aims higher in order to hit the target (1094a22–4). Rousseau set his natural being as the *telos* necessary to correct the misanthropic judgments of humanity that were in abundance around him. In its most basic form, a teleology contains at least three points: a point of departure, the point at which it is employed, and the end point. It is hard not to read these as temporal and, even chronological, which is why Rousseau warned against doing so. Instead of the "Embryo of the species," the solitary natural human being of the "pure state of nature" represented an untainted picture of the potential in humanity (SD, I sec. 1). That picture revealed the depravity of the human beings Rousseau saw around him, the human beings who had been the drivers of history. His teleology was not driven by some naive desire to bring humanity to the standard set by his "savage" but by the wish to provide a way for us to really improve by learning how to control our passions. As Rousseau would put it later, "the Theory of man is not a vain speculation when it is founded on nature, proceeds with the support of facts by well-linked consequences, and in leading us to the source of the passions, teaches us to regulate their course" (*Letter to Beaumont*, 31).

If these arguments make it clear that Rousseau's targets were the moral philosophers in general and Hobbes in particular, they may appear less clear about the extent to which they were also aimed at theologians, as I claimed earlier. In concluding part 1 of the *Second*

Discourse, Rousseau explained: “if I have dwelt at such length on the assumption of this primitive condition, it is because, having ancient errors and inveterate prejudices to destroy, I believed I had to dig to the root, and to show in the depiction of the genuine state of Nature how far inequality, even natural inequality, is from having as much reality and influence in that state as our Writers claim” (SD, I sec. 47). The dominant theory regarding the genuine state of nature at the time would have located evidence of that condition somewhere in the book of Genesis, yet Rousseau nowhere addressed that source explicitly in the *Discourse on Inequality*. A few years after the *Second Discourse*, he published *Émile*. In the opening line of book 1, Rousseau wrote: “everything is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man.”²⁸ This shift from nature to the creator is apt in light of the fact that *Émile* drew the sharpest criticism for its section on religion, known as the “Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar.” Indeed, of his numerous critics, Rousseau chose to respond only to Christophe de Beaumont, the archbishop of Paris.²⁹

In his letter, Rousseau proclaimed that the “fundamental principle of all morality about which I have reasoned in all my Writings and developed in this last one with all the clarity of which I was capable, is that man is a naturally good being, loving justice and order; that there is no original perversity in the human heart, and that the first movements of nature are always right” (*Letter to Beaumont*, 28). Rousseau is well aware that Beaumont’s—indeed, Christianity’s—case rests on the doctrine of original sin, so he directs his efforts at its rebuttal. Once again imitating Hobbes, Rousseau declares that scripture and reason are the “unique rules” of his beliefs, and argues that these two guides surely lead to the conclusion that there are highly problematic elements of

28 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979): 37.

29 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Letter to Beaumont*, trans. Christopher Kelly and Judith R. Bush (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2001).

the church's doctrine regarding human beings, which have had grave consequences for humanity (*Letter to Beaumont*, 47).³⁰ Singling out "the Rhetorician Augustine and our Theologians," Rousseau finds it incomprehensible that God would have created innocent souls only to condemn them to eternal damnation by placing them in guilty bodies (*Letter to Beaumont*, 29). Citing the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau argues that he has shown that the natural human being was devoid of reason and, hence, incapable of knowing good and evil. Rousseau was willing to concede that the human being he had described in part 1 of the *Discourse on Inequality* did not exist, but he noted that what was important was that "he may exist in assumption" (*Letter to Beaumont*, 40). Thus, part 1 emerges as an alternative not simply to Hobbes's account of the natural human being but also to the one theologians had extracted from Genesis in order to justify submission, oppression, hierarchy, theft, and murder. Rousseau's ambition was to return to principles that were general and common to all human beings, "for if, by wanting to reason, you leave a foothold for the authority of Priests, you give fanaticism back its weapon, and you provide it with the means for greater cruelty" (*Letter to Beaumont*, 55). Rousseau's bet was that those general principles would allow human beings of all religions to find common ground and peace.

CONCLUSION

In a broad sense, Hobbes and Rousseau directed their efforts toward the correction of what they saw as a fundamental imbalance in human beings, namely that between the passions and reason. Their different circumstances and aims make the contrast between their respective positions easier to spot, and Rousseau's attacks on Hobbes reinforce the sense of disagreement between them. If we recall, however, that

30 See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, VIII: 38–39; Review and Conclusion, 395.

Hobbes was attempting to establish peace and order by preventing a slide toward anarchy, whereas Rousseau was trying to rescue humanity from despotism, it becomes clear that specific—and important—points of disagreement should be seen in the context of a broad agreement about the long-term interests of human beings. This claim is controversial and impossible to defend here, but it should be borne in mind that the language which Hobbes and Rousseau used to refer to human beings indicates that they were referring not only to their contemporaries but to humanity across time. There is abundant evidence of this practice, but let me mention one or two examples. Where Hobbes is concerned, one could point to his admiration of Thucydides's “everlasting possession,” as expressed in his view of his history's utility, as well as the Introduction to *Leviathan*, which is addressed to one who would govern “mankind,” meaning of course not a universal ruler but one who would rule over human beings, regardless of when and where. For his part, Rousseau began the *Second Discourse* by proclaiming: “it is of man that I am to speak, and the question I examine tells me that I shall be speaking to men” (SD, Exordium, sec. 1). Perhaps the best piece of evidence, however, is their common reference to “*γνώθι σαυτὸν*” as a timeless piece of advice for human beings that was also the most important.

If this is correct, how is one to understand the solutions they proposed? Were they “utopian,” in the sense of envisioning a radical transformation of the conditions they described, or institutional solutions meant to keep the ills they diagnosed in check? Although some recent commentators have seen Hobbes as a utopian who believed in the possibility of transforming human nature,³¹ Hobbes held consistently to the view that the political challenges posed by human nature could

31 See, e.g., Richard Tuck, “The Utopianism of *Leviathan*,” in *Leviathan after 350 Years*, ed. Tom Sorell and Luc Foisneau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 125–38, 132; see Noel Malcolm, *Reason of State, Propaganda and the Thirty Years' War: An Unknown Translation by Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 123.

only be checked by means of structural changes, in the form of institutions, and continuous education and indoctrination. Hobbes offered a foretaste of this view in the Epistle Dedicatory to the *Elements*, where he declared: "it would be an incomparable benefit to commonwealth, if every man held the opinions concerning law and policy here delivered" (*EL*, Epistle Dedicatory, xvi). Having spent the next decade refining his message, in *Leviathan* he expressed the hope that a sovereign free from the influence of self-interested advisors would, "in protecting the Publique teaching of it, convert this Truth of Speculation, into the Utility of Practice" (*Leviathan*, 31: 193). Even without royal sanction, Hobbes considered *Leviathan* to have "framed the minds of a thousand gentlemen to a conscientious obedience to present government, which otherwise would have wavered in that point" (*EW*, VII: 336). Spreading that effect to the rest of the population, as he had hoped in the *Elements*, and maintaining it by every means at the sovereign's disposal was the only policy that could keep the children of pride in check. The starting point of a successful method had to be the observation that human beings measure not just other human beings "but all other things, by themselves" (*Leviathan*, 2: 4). Beginning there, Hobbes developed a science of rhetoric that he presented through a rhetoric of science, in which the reader is treated as if she were an authority and even a sovereign.³²

For his part, Rousseau also sought a solution to the predicament of modern human beings in institutions. Although he, too, embraced the idea of a social contract and placed a great deal of emphasis in education, he also thought that human beings would have to be confined to small, agricultural city-states that could protect them not only from the violence of others, but also from their customs, mores, and influence. Thus, he extolled Corsica as the only country in Europe "capable of

32 On Hobbes's rhetoric, see Evrigenis, *Images of Anarchy*. On the sovereign reader, see also James Farr, "Atomes of Scripture": Hobbes and the Politics of Biblical Interpretation," in *Hobbes and Political Theory*, ed. Mary G. Dietz, 172–96 (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990), 185–88.

receiving legislation,” expecting that it “will one day astound Europe” (*SC*, II.10).

In many ways both Hobbes and Rousseau followed well-established formulas in their examinations of human beings, locating them in relation to the beasts and God, singling out their capacity for speech and reason, distinguishing between nature and artifice, and invoking natural law and free will. Even on well-trodden paths, however, they made new discoveries and pointed to new directions. The most important and far-reaching of these was their attention to and development of the idea that human beings are equal. As the concepts of natural law and natural right developed from Hobbes's works to Rousseau's there emerged a conception of human equality that was far stronger than any other, so strong that it became impossible to restrain.

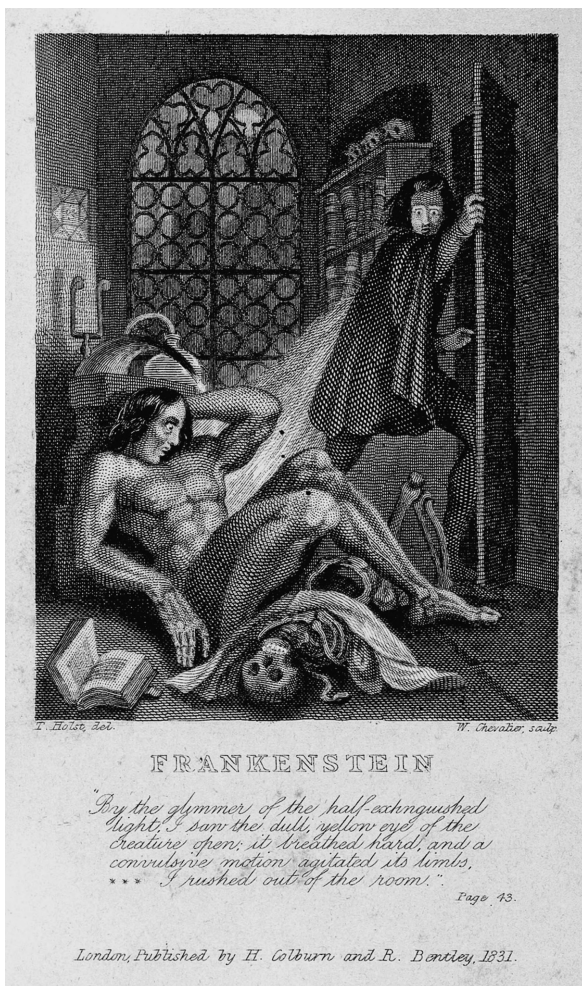


FIGURE 12 Victor Frankenstein observing the first stirrings of his creature, an engraving by W. Chevalier after Theodore von Holst, the frontispiece to the 1831 edition of Mary Shelley's novel.

Reflection

IS FRANKENSTEIN'S CREATURE A HUMAN WITH
RIGHTS? CONCEPTUALIZING THE RIGHTS OF
THE CHILD AFTER GENETIC ENGINEERING

Eileen Hunt Botting



Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818) is a masterpiece of science fiction that raises the philosophical questions "What is a human being?" and "What are the rights of the human being?" through the story and voice of the Creature made by a chemist, Victor Frankenstein.¹ The novel also presciently addresses a bioethical question that is highly pertinent in the twenty-first century: "Do biotechnological interventions in the making of a human being change the rights that should be accorded such a child?" In the wake of recent advances in genetic engineering—including three-person in vitro fertilization and genome editing—*Frankenstein* has never been more relevant for thinking through the ways that biotechnological modifications to the human genome do and do not affect the scope and content of human rights.² The predicament of Frankenstein's

1 Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 2nd ed., ed. Paul J. Hunter (New York: Norton, 2012), cited in the text hereafter as *Frankenstein*, followed by page number.

2 Shoukhrat Mitalipov and Don P. Wolf, "Clinical and Ethical Implications of Mitochondrial Gene Transfer," *Trends in Endocrinology & Metabolism* 25 (2014): 5–7; Paul Knoepfler, *GMO*

Creature—who suffers deeply due to his scientist-father's and society's mistreatment of him as a “monster” from the very beginning of his life—vividly illustrates that even if a child is made quite differently from other humans, the child is still a person deserving of recognition as a human. Listening to the story of Frankenstein's Creature can help readers understand why it is that genetically modified children of the twenty-first century should not be seen as unhuman, inhuman, or subhuman creatures to be feared as competitors to the human species. Rather, genetically modified children represent a “new kind of human being” worthy of the same slate of rights as other humans—especially to love and community.³

Shelley's story has been so influential in the arts over the past two centuries that it is familiar to almost everyone, even those who have not read her novel. Victor Frankenstein is a chemist who makes a “human being” (also described as “the creature”) out of the parts of human and other animal corpses; he proceeds to animate the body with the aid of electricity (*Frankenstein* 33, 35). In twenty-first-century biological terms, the Creature could be compared to an interspecific chimera. Interspecific “chimeras are creatures with cells, tissues, or organs from individuals of two different species.”⁴ Frankenstein's Creature can be compared to a “part-human” interspecific chimera, which is “morally controversial” when it comes to the question of how it might impact human reproduction: what if “a chimeric mouse with human sperm” mated with “a chimeric mouse with human eggs”?⁵ This ethical scenario is akin to the counterfactual conditional that Victor

Sapiens: The Life-Changing Science of Designer Babies (London: World Scientific, 2016); Jun Wu et al., “Interspecies Chimerism with Mammalian Pluripotent Stem Cell,” *Cell* 168 (2017): 473–86.

3 Knoepfler, *GMO Sapiens*, 87.

4 Françoise Baylis and John Scott Robert, “Part-Human Chimeras; Worrying the Facts, Probing the Ethics,” *American Journal of Bioethics* 7 (2007): 41–58, 41.

5 Baylis and Robert, “Part-Human Chimeras,” 42.

Frankenstein proposes near the end of the novel, regarding the possible consequences of the mating of the Creature and the (as yet unanimated) equal female companion: what if the creatures reproduced and made a “race of devils” capable of destroying the “species of man”? (*Frankenstein*, 119) In his apocalyptic speculation of human extinction caused by a technologically made competitor species, Victor presciently articulates the “competitive exclusion” a against genetic engineering.⁶

At the same time, Victor makes a number of questionable (and perhaps self-serving) assumptions, which reveal some of the ethical limitations of the competitive exclusion argument against genetic engineering. First, it is not clear that the Creature or his proposed equal female companion would be fertile (they may be infertile hybrids, like mules), or even that either will want to have sex or reproduce together. Even if Victor as a scientist was somehow certain that he had designed the Creature as a fertile interspecific chimera, he presumably could have made the female infertile prior to animating her—although this scenario raises its own set of ethical issues concerning modification of embryos, fetuses, or children with regard to fertility. Finally, it is not clear that the creatures or any offspring would necessarily be destructive toward the human species, intentionally or not. From an evolutionary perspective, one can surmise that their greater strength and resilience would increase their longevity relative to humans.⁷ Combined with breeding on a broad scale, the presumed longevity of the creatures could produce a competitor species for humans in the long run.⁸

The Creature’s relationship to the reproductive process is much murkier in the novel itself. In the Creature’s single use of the term

6 Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (New York: Picador, 2002), 216; Nathaniel J. Dominy and Justin D. Yeakel, “*Frankenstein* and the Horrors of Competitive Exclusion,” *BioScience* 67 (2017): 107–10, 107.

7 Dominy and Yeakel, “*Frankenstein*,” 107.

8 Dominy and Yeakel, “*Frankenstein*,” 108.

“mate,” he situates himself ambiguously between “each man” and “a wife” on the one side and “each beast” and “his mate” on the other (*Frankenstein*, 120). Standing in the middle between human and beast and their respective practices of marriage and mating, the Creature asks for an equal female “companion” with whom he could escape far from human beings and civilization to the “wilds of South America” where they would live alone, in a “peaceful and human” way, as vegetarian nomads, with little environmental footprint, making “our bed of dried leaves”—a symbol of infertility (*Frankenstein*, 101–3). It seems that the Creature might not want a mate or a marriage at all—but rather a friend with whom he can share the love and community so unfairly denied him by his callous father-scientist and every other person who runs away from him in horror of his strange and unnerving visage.

Putting the Creature’s words aside for a moment, let us grant for the sake of argument (1) that Victor’s assumptions about the creatures’ reproductive powers and desires are correct, (2) that from these, the predicted apocalyptic consequences will follow, and (3) that he has a duty to stop the creatures’ reproduction for the sake of the preservation of the human species. Even granting these assumptions, it does not follow that Victor has a duty to (1) deny his Creature a nonreproductive companion of some sort who could be a fitting substitute for a parent, or (2) destroy the female rather than animate her without reproductive powers. This chain of moral reasoning is relevant to scientists who make part-human interspecific chimeras, with or without reproductive powers.⁹

The story of the artificially made and modified Creature suggests that children’s rights are in fact the most fundamental kind of rights, because each and every person—regardless of origins, features, or capacities—begins life as a vulnerable child. These

9 Wu et al., “Interspecies Chimerism.”

fundamental rights of the child include, first and foremost, a right to share love with parents or fitting substitutes, for such love is essential to all children's healthy and happy development.¹⁰ As Shelley's Creature poetically demands of his father-scientist, he has a "right" as a child to "live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being" (*Frankenstein*, 101). Without love of a parent or fitting substitute, the Creature fails to emotionally thrive, as any young child would, despite his incredible strength, size, capacity for cognitive development and language acquisition, and ability to physically survive on his own. A hybrid or chimera of human and other animal parts, the Creature is pushed out of the human community due to his hideous deformity and is made into the monster his maker originally, tragically, mistakenly thought he was.

When we focus on the need to reassess children's and other human rights after genetic engineering, Shelley's novel emerges as a resource for thinking through the rights of all children (artificially made or modified or not) to both parental love and nondiscrimination. As for the child's right to love, the story of the Creature disputes the approach of the most prominent defender of the "right to be loved," S. Matthew Liao. Liao derives and justifies all children's rights (including the passively formulated right "to be loved") from an as yet unsequenced human gene for moral agency.¹¹ Both the counterfactual case of the Creature and the factual case of genetically modified children challenge such a deterministic approach that grounds children's moral status as rights-holders upon a static or biologically essentialist conception of the human genome as fixed, or independent of ongoing environmental influences and changes. First, Liao's deterministic argument could arbitrarily exclude some children from rights solely because of

10 S. Matthew Liao, *The Right to Be Loved* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 74.

11 Liao, *Right to Be Loved*, 17–25.

their biological differences from the current norm for human genomic content. By rooting human agency and capability for rights-holding in a hypothetical human gene, Liao runs the risk of excluding genetically modified children from the rights they need for healthy and happy development from the very outset of life, because they have had the wrong gene deleted or modified in vitro. Second, his deterministic argument projects a false image of the human genome as static, rather than evolving, in part due to the use of assisted reproductive technology. Genetically modified children are not unhuman or nonhuman but “a new kind of human being.”¹² The same may be said of the Creature—while he is seen as a “savage” and a “monster,” he was designed as a “human being” with distinctive features and capacities developed from his unique biotechnological reproductive circumstances (being made from dead body parts in a laboratory) and early child development (being abandoned immediately after birth and rejected by everyone in society for his different appearance) (*Frankenstein*, 14, 36, 33).

As for children’s nondiscrimination rights, the tragic story of the Creature’s abandonment, abuse, and neglect—due to his creation with a deformity—suggests the right of all children (genetically modified or not) to nondiscrimination on the basis of reproductive circumstances or genetic features. I have shown that deterministic approaches to justifying children’s fundamental right to love could easily lead to discrimination against genetically modified children on the basis of their different genetic features. In addition, genetically modified children could be made by rogue scientists, like Victor, in a cold and unfeeling laboratory environment, with unregulated use of gamete donors and surrogates (or, prospectively, artificial womb technology) and without parents to love and care for them upon birth.¹³ Groups could also emerge who denounce

¹² Knoepfler, *GMO Sapiens*, 87.

¹³ Knoepfler, *GMO Sapiens*, 208.

the creation of genetically modified children and seek to deny their civil, political, and human rights on the grounds that their DNA is different from human DNA.¹⁴ There could also be systematic as well as systemic forms of social, cultural, and religious discrimination against genetically modified children and their families that would prevent their enjoyment of equal opportunities for education, healthcare, association, free speech, church membership, sports, work, property, and other civil liberties.¹⁵ In a culture that puts a high price on non-GMO labels and denounces Frankenfoods as bad for kids, what would it be like to grow up as a genetically modified child confronted with such stereotypes?

On the flip side, non-genetically modified children of the future could suffer discrimination due to their supposedly inferior genetic features as compared to “designer” or “enhanced” genetically modified children. There has been some speculation already that “genetically modified athletes” could have preferential status in sports if access and participation are not regulated in a way that is fair to non-genetically modified athletes.¹⁶ Others have argued that both genetically modified and non-genetically modified children may incur birth defects due to interventions of assisted reproductive technology. These children may have disabilities that subject them to special forms of discrimination due to their reproductive origins.¹⁷ As mentioned earlier, some have postulated

¹⁴ Knoepfler, *GMO Sapiens*, 223.

¹⁵ U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act, 2008, <https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/statutes/gina.cfm>; Maxwell Mehlman, *Transhumanist Dreams and Dystopian Nightmares: The Promise and Peril of Genetic Engineering* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 71–111; Mary Ann Mason and Tom Ekman, *Babies of Technology: Assisted Reproduction and the Rights of the Child* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 42.

¹⁶ Andy Miah, *Genetically Modified Athletes: Biomedical Ethics, Gene Doping, and Sport* (London: Routledge, 2004).

¹⁷ Kirsten Rabe Smolensky, “Parental Tort Liability for Direct Preimplantation Genetic Interventions: Technological Harms, the Social Model of Disability, and Questions of Identity,” *Hastings Law Journal* 60 (2008), Arizona Legal Studies Discussion Paper no. 08-27.

in eugenic or evolutionary terms the inevitable destruction of the human species due to the rise of a competitor species of genetically modified people, sometimes even called Frankenstein's monsters.¹⁸

Although such speculation is extreme and unverifiable in its apocalyptic assumptions about the unknowable long-term consequences of genetic engineering, its even remote possibility suggests the pressing ethical need to treat genetic features and reproductive circumstances of all children under nondiscrimination law, national and international. In order to offer truly universal coverage and protection for the most vulnerable people in society, children's nondiscrimination rights must include genetic features and reproductive circumstances alongside established nondiscrimination categories such as race, gender, and disability and must affirm treatment of these different vectors of social identity as intersecting and mutually reinforcing.¹⁹ As Donna Haraway powerfully imagines in her recent science fiction, the future of humanity and the environment could depend upon the flourishing—not the abolition—of genetically modified creatures, or what she calls “animal symbiont” children.²⁰ In the Shelleyan spirit of sharing “sympathies” with Frankenstein's Creature, we should be welcoming the genetically modified child into the fold of humanity to find refuge under the big tent of universal rights.

18 Fukuyama, *Posthuman Future*, 216; Dominy and Yeakel, “Frankenstein.”

19 UNESCO, Report of the IBC (International Bioethics Committee) on Updating Its Reflection on the Human Genome and Human Rights, 2015, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002332/233258E.pdf>.

20 Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 140.



FIGURE 13 Illustration from Johannes de Fontana, *Belli Corum instrumentorum liber cum figuris* (15th century)

CHAPTER 9

The Concept of Humanity in Kant's Transcendental Philosophy

Clinton Tolley

TRANSCENDENTAL PHILOSOPHY AS A HUMANISTIC PHILOSOPHY?

Many of Kant's readers over the years, especially of late, have taken Kant to be one of the most paradigmatic philosophers of humanity. More specifically, Kant is portrayed as advocating a kind of "humanizing" of philosophy itself, with respect to its methodology and primary subject matter, its claims about what are to serve as philosophical "principles," and the resulting philosophical vision that follows from these principles. Concerning methodology and subject matter, the very first words of the first edition of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* are "*human* reason," and Kant's strategy in this work is to use this reason to achieve a complete "self-cognition" in order to assess which of its "claims" can actually be justified

(Axi).¹ Concerning philosophical principles, Kant's "fundamental propositions" (*Grundsätze*) in both his theoretical and his practical philosophy would seem to be derived from facts already in hand about human mental capacities: sensibility, understanding, and of course reason itself.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Kant's "Copernican" shift to a focus on the nature of human subjectivity has been taken to have as its result a vision of philosophy presented wholly from the perspective of, and especially in light of the limits of, the human mind itself. Leading interpretations of Kant's theoretical philosophy, for example—especially of the significance of the principles that he takes to underwrite the ontology and epistemology involved in his transcendental idealism—emphasize his internalization of the subject matter of theoretical philosophy (nature) to show how this is to be reconceptualized and delimited to include only what is accessible from the specifically "human standpoint,"² rather than what is simply true per se, or "in itself." Similarly, leading interpretations of Kant's practical philosophy—especially of the principles which underwrite the deontology at the heart of Kant's account of ethics and politics, including what Kant himself calls the "principle of humanity" (*Prinzip der Menschheit*; see 4:430)—emphasize the way in which human beings themselves function as grounds for moral "worth," serving not just as "ends in themselves" but also as "the ultimate end of creation here on earth" (5:426). Both claims again seem indicative of Kant's intention to put forward a vision that contrasts not

1 Immanuel Kant, *Kants gesammelten Schriften* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1900–); and Immanuel Kant, *The Cambridge Edition of Kant's Works*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992–). I will cite Kant's works according to the now standard format of using the "Academy Edition" volume and page numbers (see Kant, *The Cambridge Edition*) for all of Kant's works except the first *Critique*, which I will cite according to the B-edition pagination; I have usually followed the translations in Kant, *The Cambridge Edition*, though I have silently amended them at several points.

2 See Béatrice Longuenesse, *Kant and the Human Standpoint*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Henry Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004).

just with appeals to divine commands but also with appeals to features of prehuman nature as what provides the ultimate basis for a theory of value.³ Indeed, in his account of aesthetic value as well, Kant has been seen as providing the same sort of humanized grounding for the principles of beauty and sublimity, as Kant claims, strikingly, that it is in fact only humans who are capable of the feelings involved in judgments of beauty (such that no other animals and not even divine beings can enjoy these states; see 5:210), and, furthermore, that the “ideal” of what is beautiful can be found only in the “human figure” (5:235).⁴ And many have heard similar notes in Kant’s account of the grounds of politics, history, and even religion.

Despite these interpretive trends, however, there are other features of Kant’s writings which put pressure on any simple “humanist” reading of Kant’s position. Perhaps most notably, at key points Kant seems to indicate that the topic of being human provides, not the starting-point but the end-point or aim for philosophy, as a topic which gives an overarching focus and unity to philosophy itself. After noting that all of the interest that we have in philosophy can be brought under three questions—“What can I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope for?” (B832–33)—Kant then claims that these three questions themselves should give rise to, and help answer, a fourth—namely, “What is a human being?” (“Was ist der Mensch?” [11:429]; see 9:25).⁵ Indeed, Kant’s own career can seem to bear out just this perspective, in light of his efforts to bring the discipline of anthropology more squarely into the purview of philosophy itself, as one of the first philosophers to offer substantial lectures on the

3 See Christine Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, ed. B. Herman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

4 See Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

5 See Martin Heidegger, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* (Bonn: Friedrich Cohen, 1929); Patrick Frierson, *Kant’s Empirical Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

discipline, first as a topic within geography, and then as a separate course in its own right.⁶

THE PROBLEMATIC STATUS OF THE CONCEPT—AND
SCIENCE(S)—OF BEING HUMAN

Whether we grant only that the topic of humanity provides a point of focus for Kant's philosophy, or whether we take the concept of being human to play a more foundational role, many of Kant's readers have found the marked tendencies toward humanism to be responsible for what is most problematic about Kant's views. In light of his continual emphasis on the human mind and its capacities, Kant seems led to a position in which nature itself is reduced to something decidedly "subjective," and value is restricted in a decidedly "species-ist" fashion, limited only to what falls within or flows from the anthropocentric sphere. This has seemed both problematic in its own right but also in conflict with other equally basic tendencies in Kant's work which seem to pull in the exact opposite direction. Foremost among these is Kant's ambition to formulate a "critical" perspective on philosophy that would be properly "transcendental," insofar as it would be both "pure" in its subject matter and consist in concepts which were derivable (and principles which were demonstrable) "apriori." Insofar as Kant's philosophy is supposed to be "pure," it is not supposed to make use of any "empirical" concept, or one that involves sensation essentially (B74); insofar as it is supposed to focus only on "apriori" concepts, it is not supposed to concern itself with any concepts which are "taken from experience," and so "aposteriori" to it (4:265–66). But then, for the concept of being human to itself be a "fundamental concept" (*Grundbegriff*) of Kant's philosophy, and indeed for this concept to give rise to genuinely

6 Robert Loudon, *Kant's Human Being* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011), 121–22; see John Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

“fundamental propositions” (*Grundsätze*), it would need to be a concept that is itself pure and of a priori origin.

How, then, can Kant's seeming appeal to given facts about human beings and their minds, to provide the principles for his philosophizing, be reconciled with his ambition to present a transcendental philosophy concerned with the “system” of “a priori concepts of objects in general” (A11), one which would merit the title of a “philosophy of pure, merely speculative reason” (A14/B28)? It is striking, in this regard, that—despite giving numerous “deductions” of several other key concepts (e.g., of space, time, substance, cause) as being of pure content and a priori origin—Kant does not anywhere in his *Critiques* explicitly identify a specifically pure concept of *being human* itself, nor does he demonstrate how it would be possible to acquire such a concept a priori. Correlative to this lack of a “metaphysical” deduction of a pure concept of being human (see B159), Kant also does not anywhere spell out a method for the “transcendental” deduction of the objective validity of the concept of being human, as he famously does for each of the concepts mentioned earlier, nor does he associate a particular body of scientific cognition a priori with the concept of being human—on the model, say, of the system of cognitions of the essence of space in geometry, or of time in chronometry.

What is more, Kant's actual remarks about the (then) current status of anthropology make it sound much closer to how he views chemistry and psychology (4:470–71), all grouped together not only in virtue of *not yet* being fully scientific enterprises but also in virtue of being endeavors for which scientific status might *never actually* be achievable. In contrast to the *sciences* of mathematics and natural physics, which systematically organize “cognition” (*Erkenntnis*) of their subject matter, anthropology is said to be only “a doctrine [*Lehre*] of *information* [*Kenntnis*] concerning the human being, systematically grasped” (7:119; my italics). Moreover, Kant emphasizes that “all such attempts to arrive at such a science [of humanity] with thoroughness encounter considerable difficulties that are inherent in human nature

itself" (7:120) and that these obstacles "make it very difficult for anthropology to rise to the rank of a formal science" (7:121).⁷

All of this would seem to stand as a straightforward obstacle to Kant nevertheless placing the concept of being human at the foundation of his own scientific system of philosophy. As if this weren't problematic enough, Kant has also been read as not only lacking a sufficiently "pure" concept of being human but as actively and illicitly drawing on the "impure," specifically *empirical*-psychological, investigation of human beings—despite his own suggestions to the contrary—in order to provide the "principles" for his own transcendental-philosophical claims. In the first *Critique*, for example, the form of our mental capacity for sensing ("sensibility") serves as the "principle" for our pure sensible concepts and grounds our cognition a priori of space and time (see B35–36); the form of our capacity for thinking and judging ("understanding") serves as the "principle" for the pure concepts of our understanding ("categories"; B106) and grounds our cognition a priori of nature; and the form of our capacity for reasoning and inferring serves as the "principle" for the pure concepts of reason ("ideas"; B378) and grounds (in a "regulative" fashion) our scientific investigation of nature. For many, this simply confirms the suspicion that all of the allegedly "pure" elements of Kant's philosophy actually seem to be drawn from the results of already existing observations on the nature and structure of the human mind and its capacities, accumulated and presented in the several decades prior by Wolff, Baumgarten, Tetens, and others, often explicitly under the heading of "empirical psychology."

To be sure, several authors after Kant (J. F. Fries, Herbart) simply embraced the idea that human psychology must serve as the starting

7 In his lectures, however, it is not clear that Kant is totally consistent on this point: "worldly cognition is thus just the same as cognition of the human being. When this observation of human beings (anthropography) is brought to a science, it is called 'anthropology,' and one attains to this science" (25:1435). See Rudolph Makkreel, "Kant on the Scientific Status of Psychology, Anthropology, and History," and Thomas Sturm, "Kant on Empirical Psychology," in *Kant and the Sciences*, ed. Eric Watkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

point for any “critical” theoretical philosophy, and then set about to provide a more precise and more fully demonstrated empirical characterization of the human mind itself. More recently, leading interpreters have sought to highlight the extent to which the true significance of Kant’s own philosophy as a whole—and perhaps even especially his practical philosophy—can only be understood from the context of his anthropological investigations, which thereby offer a corrective to readings which insist on emphasizing Kant’s seeming ambitions toward the pure and the *a priori*.⁸ Even so, many other post-Kantians have viewed this felt tension at the heart of Kant’s project to be a sign, instead, of its ultimate incoherence, and have opted for a more wholesale rejection of this dimension of Kant’s philosophy, arguing that philosophy cannot be thought of as ultimately grounded on human psychology at all, or else it will be unable to avoid falling into an inconsistent “psychologism” about its most basic concepts (of being, truth, goodness, value, and so on).⁹

Other post-Kantians have sought to explore a more conciliatory strategy—namely, to find in Kant, or construct on his behalf, a suitably pure (or “transcendental”) concept of the human mind, a “transcendental” psychology,¹⁰ or even more ambitiously, a pure or transcendental

8 See Susan Shell, *The Embodiment of Reason: Kant on Spirit, Generation, and Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Allen Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Tamar Schapiro, “Kantian Rigorism and Mitigating Circumstances,” *Ethics* 117 (2006): 32–57; Robert Loudon, *Kant's Impure Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Jeanine Grenberg, *Kant's Defense of Common Moral Experience: A Phenomenological Account* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Frieron, *Kant's Empirical Psychology*.

9 This took at least two distinct forms: on the one hand a trend toward logical idealism, which sought to retain a “pure” grounding of philosophy, only now not in the human mind but instead in a purely logical realm of concepts and propositions “in themselves” (see Bolzano; eventually some strands in the neo-Kantians, along with Frege, Husserl); on the other hand a trend toward absolute idealism, which sought instead to give a genuinely philosophical grounding for anthropology itself not just in pure logic (in an “absolute idea” of philosophy) but also in the real historical development of “spirit” from mere nature, through humanity, and on to expressions of a spirit more “absolute” than that of humanity (see Schelling, Hegel).

10 See Patricia Kitcher, *Kant's Transcendental Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Wayne Waxman, *Kant's Anatomy of the Intelligent Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

concept of being human in general, a transcendental anthropology.¹¹ The attempt at a transcendental anthropology is more ambitious insofar as Kant, along with the tradition leading up to him, regularly takes the human being (i.e., the subject matter for anthropology) to include more than a set of merely psychological capacities (hence to be more than “the mind”) and to include, more specifically, human physiology or embodiment. What a pure concept—or really any “pure” representation—of the specifically human *body* might look like is itself not altogether clear. Nor is it obvious how such a representation could be given to the mind a priori, independently of the (seemingly quite particular) experience (and specifically: sensation) of one’s own body itself. In fact, as we will see, it is not actually clear that the case is much better for the possibility of a pure concept (or any pure representation) of the human *mind* and its capacities either. Yet without pure representations of either the human mind or human body, it is hard to see how any pure science of being human as such could even get off the ground (as Kant himself seemed to acknowledge)—let alone provide the principles for the rest of a pure transcendental philosophy.

THE DEFINITION OF BEING HUMAN IN KANT’S CONTEXT: BAUMGARTEN

In order to better appreciate why the concept of being human comes to have a problematic status within the interpretation of Kant’s philosophy, we can look more closely at the manner in which the concept of being human, and anthropology as the correlative discipline which has the human being as its topic, is discussed in Kant’s historical context, before turning to Kant’s own remarks. In the textbook on metaphysics that Kant used for his own lectures, at the outset of a section entitled “rational psychology,” Alexander Baumgarten defines “human being”

11 See Angelica Nuzzo, *Ideal Embodiment* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008).

(*homo*) as possessing a specific kind of soul in a specific kind of interaction with a specific kind of body, all of which makes a human a species of "animal": "a *human soul* [*anima humana; eine menschliche Seele*] is a soul in the closest interaction [*commercio*] with a human body [*cum corpore humano*]. And since a soul with the body with which it is in the closest interaction constitutes an *animal* [*animal; Tier*], a human soul along with the body with which it is in the closest interaction constitutes the animal that we call *the human being* [*hominem; einem Menschen*]" (*Metaphysica* sec. 740).¹² The interaction with its body is manifested in the human soul's "capacity" to move the body in accordance with its "power for representing" (sec. 750); and since it not only can represent the position of its own body in relation to the universe more generally but can do so "distinctly," Baumgarten claims that the human soul doesn't just interact with its body but "understands" (*intelligit*) it, and is therefore a "spirit" (*spiritus*; sec. 754). On this basis, Baumgarten affirms the classical definition of the human being as "*rational animal*" (sec. 792). Other animals which lack "understanding" are said to also lack "personality," "reason," "will," and "freedom" (*libertas*) (sec. 795).

Along with these basic determinations of the concept of being human (being a rational soul or spirit (namely, person), being in commerce with a specific body, being an animal), Baumgarten then specifies several forms of "cognition" that can be directed at the human being, in light of its constituent parts: "the human being [*homo*] consists of a finite soul and a finite body (sec. 741, 743), and hence is internally alterable (sec. 740), as well as being a finite and contingent being (sec. 202, 257). Therefore, philosophical and mathematical cognition of the human being is possible (sec. 249), that is, philosophical *anthropology* and mathematical anthropology, or *anthropometry* [*anthropometria*], just as is empirical anthropology through experience. The complex of rules that are to be observed in cognizing the human being

12. Alexander Baumgarten, *Metaphysica*, 7th ed. (Impensis C. H. Hemmerde, 1779). I have mostly followed the English translation by Courtney Fugate and John Hymers (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

is *anthropognostics* [*anthropognosia*]” (*Metaphysica* sec. 747). Though Baumgarten himself doesn’t use the terminology of “pure” (versus “empirical”) here, he does suggest that the philosophical and mathematical ways of cognizing the human being will not derive “from experience.” Precisely how philosophical anthropology and mathematical anthropometry are supposed to proceed—and in particular, whether they will be built up out of separate sciences of the human mind (psychology) and the human body (physiology), or whether these will instead be derived from a more unified treatment of the human being in general—is left here unspecified.¹³

THE AMBIGUITY OF “BEING HUMAN” IN KANT’S
TRANSCENDENTAL IDEALISM: *HOMO PHAENOMENON*
AND *HOMO NOUMENON*

Kant’s own 1798 *Anthropology* and the lecture transcripts from his anthropology courses make clear that he, too, accepts that the human being includes both specifically intellectual *mental* capacities and a living *corporeality* (“animality”) and can therefore be read as taking on the basic contours of the traditional definition of being human.¹⁴ Even so, we might suspect that his own conception of the significance of this traditional definition will be affected by the broader shift in his philosophy as a whole to an idealist metaphysics.

13 In the flow of the *Metaphysica*, at least, these remarks contrasting empirical and philosophical anthropology (and the definition of “human” as well) occur at the outset of a section entitled “rational psychology,” which is itself said to “deduce its assertions from the concept of the soul,” in contrast to “empirical psychology,” which “deduces its assertions from its own experiences” (sec. 503), which might suggest that genuinely philosophical anthropology is properly thought of as a form of rational psychology. Compare Corey Dyck, *Kant and Rational Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), chap. 2.

14 In a suggestive reformulation of the classical definition (namely, *animal rationale*) in the *Anthropology* itself, Kant might even seem to prioritize the animality of the human, in at least one respect: being human is not to be defined as being *always* or *already* a rational being but instead as being an animal that is capable of *becoming* rational—i.e., “an animal endowed with the capacity of reason [*als mit Vernunftfähigkeit begabtes Tier (animal rationabile)*]” such that it “can make out of itself a rational animal [*animal rationale*]” (7:321).

This is confirmed by the setting in which Kant finally takes up the topic of the human being more directly within the first *Critique*. This occurs quite late in the work, in the context of arguing for the necessity of accepting transcendental idealism about the immediate objects of sense ("appearances"), in order to achieve an acceptable solution to one of the Antinomies that arise when reason tries to infer from features of sensible objects what must be true of their conditions. The relevant (Third) Antinomy concerns a pair of inferences. One moves from the fact that a certain kind of causality is manifest in our experience ("empirical cognition," cognition based on sensation) of nature ("natural causality") to the conclusion that this is the *only* causality present in the world more generally (see B473). The other moves from the fact that a different kind of "spontaneous" causality ("freedom") is manifest in the *nonempirical* consciousness ("pure apperception") of our own selves and our intellectual activity, to the conclusion that natural causality is *not* the only causality present in the world (see B574). Kant's resolution of this seeming contradiction is to deny that nature, considered as the object of our experience and our sensory intuitions, is identical with the world-whole. Nature, so understood, is constituted (in some sense) by sensory appearances which are merely representations in our mind and hence "ideal," whereas the world-whole would also include whatever real conditions there might be for appearances themselves, including our own mental activity, insofar as it gives rise (or at least seems to) to "inner" appearances (see B519).

It is here, in the context of a problem for reason, that Kant finally introduces the topic of "the human being." He notes how this being itself seems (even pre-philosophically) to have a problematic existence, insofar as it seems to occupy both the realm of nature and the realm of freedom, and hence seems to be both a sensible object (appearance)—a "phenomenon" in the world of sense—and a nonsensible or merely "intelligible object":

The human being is one of the appearances in the world of sense, and to that extent also one of the natural causes whose causality

must stand under empirical laws. As such he must accordingly also have an empirical character, just like all other natural things. . . . Yet the human being, who is otherwise acquainted with the whole of nature solely through sense, cognizes himself [*erkennt sich*] also through pure apperception, and indeed in actions and inner determinations which cannot be accounted at all among impressions of sense; he obviously is in one part phenomenon, but in another part, namely in regard to certain capacities, he is a merely intelligible object, because the actions of this object cannot at all be ascribed to the receptivity of sensibility. We call these capacities understanding [*Verstand*] and reason [*Vernunft*]. (B574–5)

Kant's own resolution of this tension in our reasoning about our divergent consciousness of ourselves is in effect to uncover a bifurcation or an ambiguity in the very concept of the human being itself: as he puts it in his later 1796 *Metaphysics of Morals*, the term "human being" must actually be taken "in two different senses," depending on whether it is meant to refer to *homo phaenomenon* (namely, human in [or as] appearance) or *homo noumenon* (namely, human as intelligible object) (6:419). To reconstruct Kant's account of human being, then, we must first follow out each side of this division of senses, and then ask whether (and how) they can both apply to the same single being.

HOMO PHAENOMENON: THE HUMAN BEING AS "EXTENDED" AND AS "LIVING"

Homo phaenomenon is defined, at least initially, first-personally—by way of the representations of "myself" as "I" *appear* to myself, as a sensible object. In the Transcendental Aesthetic, Kant tells us that this appearing can take two different forms: via the "outer intuitions" that I have of my body and its actions, as present in space, and then via the "inner intuitions" that represent my mind itself and its psychological activity as unfolding in time, intuitions which arise through a kind of

self-affection of my mind by its own activity (see B37). That I am an object to myself in outer intuition points to the manner in which the human being, by virtue of its body, belongs to *corporeal* nature more broadly; it possesses a location in corporeal space (is in the “place where I find myself”; see B38), and interacts mechanical-causally with other bodies, for example, by being moved to another location through impact. Yet in addition to belonging to the domain of “extended nature” (corporeality) in virtue of outer intuitions of its body in space, the human being also belongs to nature in virtue of the inner intuitions of its mind and its mental activity in time. More specifically, the human mind itself (hence the human being) belongs to the distinctly *psychical* side of nature, or “thinking nature” (*denkende Natur*; see 4:467).

It is not exactly clear what Kant takes the relationship to be between these two kinds of nature. For one thing, Kant rejects the idea that the activity of the mind *per se* (thoughts, etc.) could ever be intuited out among the bodies in space that constitute “extended nature” (see A358). Yet though the mind and its activity therefore does not have any specific bodily location in corporeal space, Kant claims it does have a kind of “virtual presence” (*virtuelle Gegenwart*) in relation to its corresponding human body in particular (see 12:32). What is more, it is through this virtual presence that the mind stands in the relation to the body as what serves as “the principle of *life*” for the human body itself (5:278). Though the body is not wholly determined by the activity of the mind, it is or can be oriented and necessitated by the mind, with “spirit” (*Geist*) as Kant’s name (echoing Baumgarten) for the “*animating* principle” of the human being as a whole (see 7:225).

As these last references to life suggest, Kant holds that the activity of the mind itself—both in and for itself, but also in relation to the body—is distinctively *nonmechanical*. Life in general involves “the capacity to be the cause of the reality of objects by means of representations” (5:9n), and, more specifically, representations of an “end” for the relevant activity, which entails that the human qua living causes its effects teleologically (5:360). Strikingly, Kant holds that, considered

per se, “the mind for itself is entirely *life* (the principle of life itself)” — so much so, that to the extent that the life of the human being encounters “hindrances or promotions,” these must come from “outside” the mind itself—more specifically, from “its connection with its body” (5:278). Kant acknowledges his sympathy with Epicurus’s idea that, in general, for humans, not just the feelings of “pain” but also those of “gratification” (“well-being”) arise paradigmatically when the mind is (or is not) able to realize its principles, or have them realized, in the body in particular—such that these states of pleasure and pain are quintessentially bodily or corporeal as well (5:331; 5:278). Whether or not every pleasure (or pain) involves the body per se, Kant does seem to affirm that it arises due to the “agreement” (or disagreement) with “the subjective conditions of life” (5:9n); in the third *Critique*, the “sensation of satisfaction” (“pleasure”) is likewise said to relate specifically to the “feeling of life” (*Lebensgefühl*; 5:204).

What complicates matters, at this point, is how Kant’s discussion of life is supposed to interact with his idealism, and more specifically, whether Kant means to ascribe life only to the mind as it is “in itself” or also to the mind as appears in inner intuition, in the form of time. While Kant’s exposition of natural-mechanical causality in the Second Analogy makes explicit reference to temporality (B233f), it is less clear that all causality involving time must itself be natural-mechanical—though Kant does claim that, insofar as the determining ground of someone’s action “belongs to past time,” the action itself cannot be counted as “within their control” (5:96; compare 6:49–50n).¹⁵ Yet it would seem that life itself could be a determination of *homo phaenomenon* only if the causality distinctive of the human mind—whether in purely mental activity or in its causality (“commerce”) in relation to the human body—could itself somehow factor into the way that the human being itself appears in inner (temporal)

15 For discussion, see Colin McLear, “On the Transcendental Freedom of the Intellect,” *Ergo* 7, 2 (2020): 35–104.

or outer (spatial) intuition respectively. In the second part of the Third *Critique*, however, which provides Kant's most sustained discussion of life (and causality involving "purposiveness," more generally) "in" nature, Kant seems to restrict the application of the concept of purposiveness—and hence, that of life itself—to the context of judgment that is "reflective" upon our experience of nature, rather than "determining" (objectively valid) of nature itself (5:360). So understood, the concepts of life and purposiveness supply our "power of judgment," with means for beginning to order (classify, subsume) the objects of our experience (empirical cognition) into general kinds, under general laws and so on, when we "reflect" on our experiences (see 5:387). Crucially, we cannot give a demonstration or "proof" of their objective validity as determinations of the actual constitution of the phenomena in nature themselves (see 5:390).

HOMO NOUMENON: THE HUMAN BEING AS PSYCHOLOGICAL AND MORAL PERSON

Kant is more straightforward in his affirmation that the human being qua *homo noumenon* is living, insofar as the human mind itself includes "the faculty of desire," and Kant holds that life itself can be understood as "the faculty of a being to act in accordance with the laws of desire" (5:91). Beyond mere desire and life, however, Kant also takes the human being qua *noumenon* to possess a faculty for the determination of desire itself according to principles of reason—what Kant calls the "practical use of reason," as concerned with "the determining grounds of the will" (5:15). For this reason, Kant ascribes to the human being causality through "freedom" in the specifically "practical" sense of the term (see B561–62).

As we have seen, Kant takes pure apperception (self-consciousness) to provide a nonsensory representation, and even cognition, of ourselves as intelligible objects, and to provide, more specifically, cognition of our faculty of reason itself, along with our faculty of understanding

(see again B574–75, quoted earlier). As Kant puts it elsewhere in the first *Critique*, pure apperception as consciousness of the understanding is consciousness of my mind's "self-activity" in "thinking" (see B130–32), an activity which itself is "free" in the sense of arising with "spontaneity" (B74–75). Consciousness of reason is consciousness of a more "absolute spontaneity" (5:99), one which consists in "freedom" not just in the "negative" sense of mere spontaneity, that is, that of being able to bring about effects independently of external causes, but in the "positive" sense of "autonomy," that is, being efficient according to laws which are "given" by reason itself (4:446–47).

It is especially in relation to the two faculties of understanding and reason that Kant characterizes the human being qua *noumenon* as possessing "personality." In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, for example, Kant claims that the human being "can and should be represented in terms of his capacity for freedom, which is wholly supersensible, and so too merely in terms of his humanity, his personality independent of physical attributes (*homo noumenon*)" (6:239). As *homo phaenomenon*, the human being belongs to "the system of nature" and is represented as an "*animal rationale*," as "sharing" an existence with "the rest of the animals"; when "regarded" as *homo noumenon*, by contrast, in virtue of possessing understanding and being able "to set themselves ends" (i.e., possession of practical reason), the human being is thought of as "a *person*" and of "value" or "worth" that is "exalted" above all other animals (6:434).

Within this broad conception of personality, Kant distinguishes two aspects, depending upon whether it is the possession of understanding or the possession of reason which is being highlighted. Possession of understanding is essential, Kant thinks, for "*psychological* personality," which consists in "the ability to be conscious of one's identity in different conditions of one's existence"; by contrast, "*moral* personality," which consists in being responsible for "action" and capable of "imputation," requires the possession not just of understanding but of practical reason (6:223; compare 6:221).

Though considerable attention has been drawn to the status of human beings as moral persons—and, in particular, the way in which possession of reason entails that a human being “exists as an end in itself” (4:428)—Kant himself often emphasizes psychological personality as already a distinguishing mark of humanity. Kant’s anthropology lectures, as well the published *Anthropology* itself, begin precisely with discussion of self-consciousness by way of the understanding as something special to human beings: “the fact that the human being can have the I in his representations elevates him infinitely above all other living beings on earth. Because of this he is a *person*, and by virtue of the unity of consciousness through all changes that happen to him, one and the same person—that is, through rank and dignity an entirely different being from *things*, such as irrational animals, with which one can do as one likes” (7:127; see 25:1215).

THE PROBLEM OF AN ADEQUATE DEFINITION OF BEING HUMAN

Having now clarified some of the key terms and distinctions that are involved in Kant’s reconception of being human, especially in relation to his division of the human according to whether it is being understood qua *phaenomenon* (in relation to its appearances) or qua *noumenon* (as an intelligible object), we can now begin to return to the original tasks set out above—namely, the assessment of the extent to which it is right to say that the concept of the human being plays a foundational role for Kant’s philosophy, such that it is “humanistic” in the sense spelled out earlier. As has now become evident, there is a wide range of determinations which are candidates to go into such a definition, some pertaining to the way in which humans appear to themselves in inner and outer sensory intuition, others pertaining to the way humans are acquainted with themselves more directly in pure apperception or self-consciousness. What we should consider, first of all, is whether these determinations, either in part or all taken together, are

actually sufficient to uniquely differentiate human beings from other kinds of being—before taking up the main question of the status that Kant accords to his own conception of the human being.

Considering the determinations individually, we can see that Kant does not believe that any one of them is unique to human beings. On the side of the human being qua sensible object, there is little hope for the possibility of either a merely spatial or temporal or a merely mechanical definition of *homo phaenomenon*. Contrary to Baumgarten's suggestion (noted earlier) of a distinctively "mathematical" cognition of human being itself, Kant does not identify any specific spatial configuration (shape) or temporal extent (duration) which would be sufficient to distinguish some sensible object as necessarily being human rather than some other kind of being.¹⁶ Similarly, in his works on the metaphysical foundations of causality in nature, Kant does not attempt to present any set of physical behaviors describable in merely mechanical- (or "dynamical"-)causal terms that would suffice to identify the kind of activity and mutual interaction that is distinctive of the human being qua *phaenomenon*. For both of these reasons, the prospects for reconstructing a merely "phenomenal" definition of a human being, on Kant's behalf, does not look promising.

Matters might seem to improve slightly if we turn to the fact that humans are animals (souls animating bodies), since this feature at least differentiates humans from the rest of merely mechanical (inorganic) nature. Yet in Kant's discussions of the human, we do not find Kant much concerned to provide a merely biological or zoological specification (in terms, e.g., of facts about the human life-cycle, or facts about

16 Kant does discuss the idea of a general procedure ("schema") for producing a sensory representation (image) of various kinds of objects, including one for dogs as "four footed" (B180), though he does not claim here that the relevant schema would be sufficient for sensibly identifying all and only dogs. Kant also discusses what he calls "the aesthetic normal idea" of a species of animal which would serve as a "universal standard" for the "aesthetic judgment of every individual of this species" (5:233), which he extends to human beings, but here again the topic is not what is universally and necessarily true of all humans qua *phaenomena* but which shape is most perfect. Compare also Kant's discussion of physiognomy in his *Anthropology* (7:295–302).

distinctively human nourishment or reproduction, etc) which would be restricted to all and only human beings. Rather, as noted earlier, the main feature that Kant points to with respect to the animality of humanity is that the human being *transcends* mere animality. While it is true that the specifically human body is “animated” according to the mental capacities for understanding and reason, it is precisely the possession of these specific capacities that Kant sees as “elevating” humans above other “mere” animals. And though Kant’s *Anthropology* does take up the question of the determination of the biological (namely, reproductive) behaviors of the human living body by understanding and reason (e.g., 7:303–11), it is made clear that such activity is not properly thought of as merely animal or natural but as a component of “culture” (7:303).

In this light, one might wonder whether, for Kant, it is really the faculties of understanding and reason that will not only supply the content for the idea of *homo noumenon* but will also suffice to uniquely differentiate human beings as such from all other beings. Yet though both faculties do distinguish humans from other animals as “persons,” Kant’s discussion of these faculties, as well as his discussion of personality itself, shows that he does not think that either these faculties or the status of personhood are unique to human beings.

Concerning specifically moral personality, Kant’s writings and lectures on philosophical theology make clear that this concept is too wide to uniquely distinguish human beings, insofar as he takes it also to apply to God (see 28:1076, 28:1091). The same is true of concept of “rational being” (being with reason), as Kant’s discussion in the *Groundwork* makes especially evident: time and again he cautions against restricting the basic principle of morality to what would “hold only for human beings, as if *other* rational beings did not have to heed it” (see 4:389; my italics). The same is true, finally, of the concept of freedom qua autonomy, insofar this too will apply to all other rational beings as well (4:447–48; including the divine being: see 28:1001, 1067).

Concerning psychological personality and the possession of an understanding, defined as the power for thinking and apperception, the prospects might initially seem to be somewhat better, insofar as God is said to not have the kind of self-consciousness that relates to *thinking* in particular (i.e., “discursive” self-consciousness). Kant specifically denies that God “thinks” (see 28:1017) and instead assigns the divine person an “intuitive” understanding (see B145; 5:406), which does not have to arrive at its representation by synthesizing a plurality of cases into a unity but rather intuitively everything that is, all at once. But if the possession of a discursive understanding might thereby distinguish humans from at least from one kind of person (God), being of a “thinking nature” is nevertheless not something that Kant takes to be necessarily unique to humans. From the time of his early writings on universal history up through his Critical writings (see B521, 28:1082), Kant allows for the possibility of “inhabitants” of other planets besides the Earth who would, like humans, consist precisely of “thinking nature” (1:351–52) with “spiritual capacities” (1:359).¹⁷

Since neither the basic features which pertain to human *qua phaenomenon* nor those which pertain to humans *qua noumenon* suffice when considered on their own to distinguish humans from other beings, it would be natural to look for something more uniquely identifying about humans in the specific combination of the two sets of features that Kant assigns to the human case. This can seem to be closer to the route that the tradition has taken, in identifying humans as not merely rational but also animals, and Kant himself seems to follow this path in the *Religion*. Here Kant distinguishes being human from being a person in terms of a difference in kinds of “predispositions to *move* in certain directions” that collectively constitute the “determination

17 In fact, as Kant’s remarks in the Paralogism might suggest that he could allow that the “thinking nature” that is “in” humans might itself turn out not to be itself specifically human: the indeterminate representation of the “I or he or *it* (*the thing*) which thinks” might refer to something in me, but not identical with me (in at least some sense of me); “nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of thoughts = x” (A404; my italics).

of the human being" (6:20). These involve not just a "predisposition to *personality*, as a rational and at the same time responsible being," but also a "predisposition to *animality*, as a living being," and it is only when these two predispositions come together that they constitute a "predisposition to the *humanity* of the human being, as a living and at the same time rational being" (6:26).

Though this generic addition to personality would also distinguish humans from the divine being,¹⁸ here again Kant's acceptance of the possibility of "inhabitants" of other planets which nevertheless possess "thinking natures" shows that the concept of a rational being (person) that is also an animal is still not sufficiently precise enough to pick out all and only specifically human beings. If humans are not distinguished from these other "inhabitants" in terms of their understanding (or reason), it would seem to follow that they must be distinguished somehow in relation to their animality, or the means by which their mental capacities animate or are in commerce with a body—or, as he puts it in the early writings, in terms of "the material [*Stoff*] of the machine they inhabit" (1:359). Though he does not go on at length on this topic in the Critical writings, Kant does seem to affirm that what would distinguish these other intelligent animals would be their specific form of "sensibility" (see B59, B72).

Now, any appeal to sensibility as a specific difference could seem to have shifted our discussion back to what might differentiate humans qua *phaenomena* alone. Against this, however, one should note the difference between (1) sensibility per se, as a real capacity in the mind, capable of real activity, and (2) the effects that arise from the exercise of sensibility, that is, its representations (products), such as sensations and intuitions. What is more, not only must (1) sensibility per se must be distinguished from (2) any of its representations (including sensible

18 Kant consistently distinguishes God from any animal, though he accepts the traditional thought that God is "alive" (is "a living being"; see 28:1000), which again implies that there is nothing in the concept of a living being that forces it to apply only to the extended and embodied *phaenomena* in nature.

ones), so too must sensibility itself be distinguished from (3) the objects of its representations, understood as “appearances”—including the special case when the representations that sensibility produces are “inner sensations” of the workings of the mind itself. Keeping these distinctions in mind, we can see that the possession of (1) sensibility itself is a feature that actually pertains to humans qua *noumenon*, even if (3) the “appearances” that arise in and through the activity of sensibility (including the appearances of humans and their activity, i.e., *homo phaenomenon*) are what constitute the domain of the *phaenomena*. And, finally, if there are distinguishing facts about different forms that (1) sensibility (the capacity considered per se) can take, these, too, will be facts that sort beings, not in terms of how they “appear” in sensory representation, but how they are in actuality—even if these differences in forms are also manifest differentially in (2) their respective effects (sensations, intuitions) and (3) the respective “appearances” that arise in these qualitatively differentiated effects (e.g., as objects “in” space, as “in” time), once the sensibilities with diverging forms are “affected.”¹⁹

CONCLUSION: FROM HUMANIST FOUNDATIONS TO ASPIRATIONS

Kant’s appeal to our being rational animals with a specific form of animality—that is, in possession of a specific form of sensibility (one that results in spatial representation of what is outside us, and temporal representation of what is in us)—thus seems to be one particularly

¹⁹ With this in mind, we might now wonder whether the fact of possessing this kind of sensibility would *on its own* be sufficient to distinguish a specifically *human form of animality* after all, even independently from its connection to the understanding or reason. Against this, it is worth noting that just as Kant does not restrict understanding and reason to humans, he does not seem to restrict the spatial and temporal form of sensibility to humans either. In his scattered remarks on the mental lives of nonhuman animals, Kant seems to ascribe (at least) outer intuitions to animals, and seems to suggest that they are spatially arranged; compare Sacha Golob, “What Do Animals See?,” in *Kant on Animals*, ed. J. Callanan and L. Allais (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 66–88.

promising, if complicated, way of distinguishing human beings from whatever other rational animals there are or might be—and ex hypothesi from whatever other nonanimal rational beings (the divine) there are or might be, as well as from whatever nonrational animals with the same forms of sensibility there might be. Various other candidate concepts we have considered—being extended, being alive, being a “psychological” person, being in possession of a discursive understanding, being a “moral” person, being in possession of reason, being autonomous—have all turned out to be concepts whose definitions do not restrict their application exclusively to human beings. What we should now consider, in conclusion, are the two worries noted at the outset—namely, whether the resulting conception of being human is something which presupposes specifically “empirical” content, and whether this conception of the human is in fact meant to function as a premise or foundation in Kant’s system, as “humanistic” interpretations have suggested.

Concerning the former question, though the information Kant uses to articulate his definition of being human includes reference not just to those facts about understanding and reason which are given in “pure apperception” but also about sensibility itself, the main issue here, in Kant’s own terms, is whether the relevant facts about sensibility itself can also be “given” nonempirically, by way of some kind of “pure” representation. In fact, one of the key advances that Kant takes his own analysis of sensibility (in the *Aesthetic*) to have over previous psychologies is precisely his foregrounding of the possibility, and actuality, of a “pure intuition” which would (sensibly) represent the form of sensibility itself, in abstraction from whatever else (namely, sensations) might arise once it is “affected” (B34–35). The consciousness of this pure intuition would itself be “pure” and could thus serve as a ground for the formation of the “pure” concept of the form of sensibility, which could then be used (along with the concepts of the faculties of understanding and reason) in the course of constructing a “pure” definition of the human being.

While this clears the way for Kant to have at his disposal what he himself would consider a nonempirical concept of the human being, it is less evident—turning to the second question—that Kant has any intention of taking up such a concept as the point of departure, as a basis or foundation, for his philosophy. Rather, as we ourselves have seen, this conception of the human is quite complex and goes a good deal beyond the common definition of *animal rationale*; in fact, it is one whose proper exposition in fact incorporates components of Kant’s “idealist” metaphysics, including his understanding of the division between *phaenomena* and *noumena*. Even if this idealism itself is articulated in reference to certain facts about mental capacities (including sensibility), the articulation of the divided nature of the being whose capacities these are—that is, the human being itself—in turn seems to make essential use of the idealism itself.

But then, rather than taking the concept of the human being to play a *foundational* role for the Kant’s Critical philosophy, we might instead reorient our sense of Kant’s relation to this concept in the following manner: away from seeing the concept of the human being as something already known, sharply conceptually delimited, and capable of serving as a principle of explanation, and toward seeing the proper definition of the concept of the human being as setting a problem, as something to be sought after, as a, or perhaps the, key *goal* of philosophy. In general, Kant thinks that philosophy, unlike mathematics, cannot start with definitions of its subject matter but can only arrive at them after considerable analytical work (see B758). As we have noted, Kant himself expresses worries about whether a pure “science” of the domain specified by this concept (a “pure anthropology”) could ever even be possible, even if he takes the “idea” of such a scientific unity to guide our inquiry into and reasoning about being human, in order to make progress in coming to systematically organize the information we acquire about what we are.²⁰

20 See Katharina Kraus, “The Soul as the ‘Guiding Idea’ of Psychology: Kant on Scientific Psychology, Systematicity, and the Idea of the Soul,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part A* 71 (2018): 77–88.

Actually knowing what we are, as human beings—knowing what kind of being it is who can unite both personality and animality, both intelligence and sensibility, both freedom and nature—will thus remain, for Kant, the ongoing “task” (*Aufgabe*) for philosophy. If not yet in possession of a comprehensive answer, philosophy must be continually oriented toward the “solution” of what we have seen earlier Kant himself identifies (at 11:429 and 9:25) as the single question that systematically unites the other three central philosophical interests (what can I know? what ought I to do? what may I hope for?)—namely, *What is a human being?*

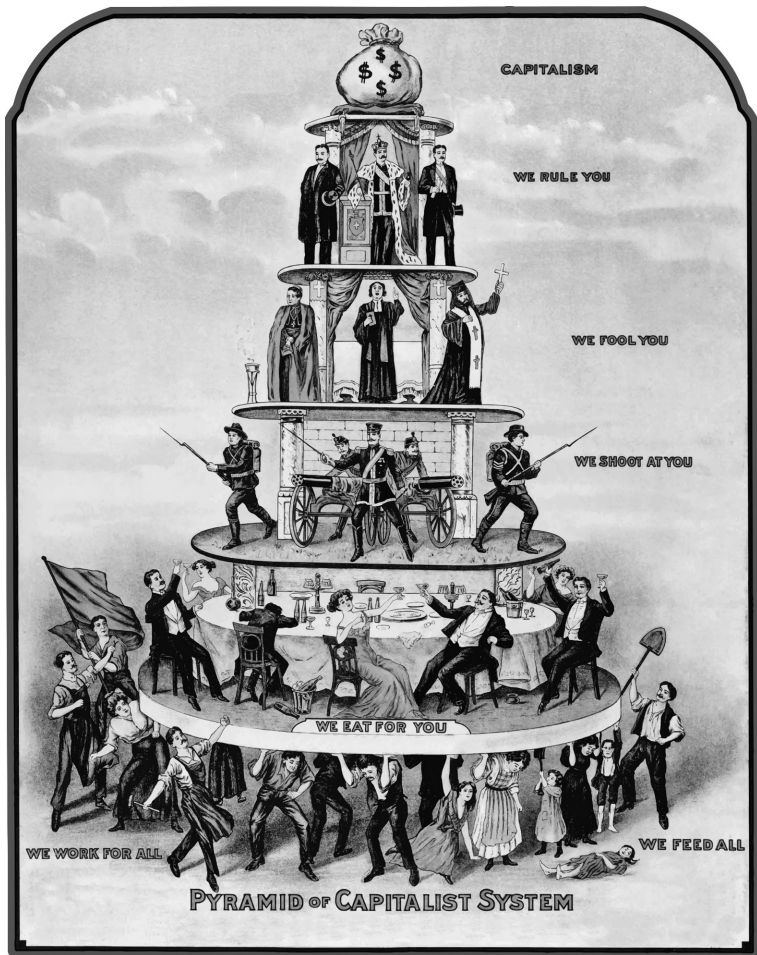


FIGURE 14 Nedeljko, Brashich, & Kuharich, *Pyramid of the Capitalist World*, for the *Industrial Worker* (1911)

Reflection

MARX ON HUMAN NATURE

Spencer J. Pack



WHAT IS SPECIFICALLY HUMAN ABOUT HUMAN NATURE?

For Marx, what separates humans from other animals is not reason, as emphasized by Aristotle and the subsequent dominant western tradition. Rather, it is work, labor, the labor process. So we read in *The German Ideology*, by the so-called young Marx and Engels, that “the first *historical* act of these individuals, the act by which they distinguish themselves from animals is not the fact that they think but the fact that they begin *to produce their means of subsistence*. . . . What they are, therefore, coincides with . . . *what* they produce and *how* they produce.”¹ We read in *Capital*, the mature Marx’s magnum opus, that “the use and construction of instruments of labor, although present in germ among certain species of animals, is characteristic of the *specifically human labor process*, and Franklin therefore defines man as a ‘tool-making animal.’”² And Engels, Marx’s great friend, frequent coauthor, patron, and to some extent popularizer, writes in the posthumously published essay “The Part

1 Karl Marx, *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society* (1835–47), ed. and trans. Loyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), 409, emphases in the original.

2 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy; Volume One: The Process of Production of Capital* (1867), trans. Ben Fowkes, with an introduction by Ernest Mandel (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 286, emphasis added. Cited by title and page number hereafter.

Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man” (and with his usual brilliant clarity) that labor “is the prime basic condition for all human existence, and this to such an extent that, in a sense, we have to say that labor created man himself.”³ Moreover, “all merit for the swift advance of civilization was ascribed to the mind, to the development of the brain,” instead of to human labor and needs.⁴

Note several points. Although the views expressed here are anti-Aristotelian, in one sense they are quite Aristotelian. They emphasize Aristotle’s *material* cause. So, for example, Marx writes in *Capital* that “the writers of history have so far paid very little attention to the development of *material production*, which is the basis of all social life, and therefore of all real history” (286 n. 2, emphasis added). Hence, one may say that if it appears that reason is what separates the human from the nonhuman animal, the ultimate real, material cause of that separation for Marx is that humans work, labor, produce. Moreover, his emphasis on production and work may be usefully contrasted with the position of that other great classical economist, Adam Smith. Smith emphasized that what separates humans from the animals is the “propensity to truck, barter, and *exchange one thing for another*.”⁵ After all, one has to admit, “nobody ever saw a dog make a fair and deliberate exchange of one bone for another with another dog.”⁶

The consequences of this are far reaching. Marx and his followers will emphasize the importance of production. The non-Marxist followers of Smith, that is, the mainstream western economic tradition, will emphasize the domain of exchange. This

3 Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972), 225.

4 Engels, *The Origin*, 233.

5 Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), ed. R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), I.ii.1:25, emphasis added.

6 Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, I.ii.2:26.

difference also manifests itself in their respective nomenclature describing their current society, as well as their dividing up of world history. Smith, following Aristotle (*Politics* 1256a–b), calls his contemporary stage of society *commercial society*. In addition, he carefully distinguishes the good effects of competitive exchangers and traders from the bad effects of monopolist traders, who may be called mercantilists, and their bad self-serving ideas which culminate in the erroneous mercantile system. Marx by contrast, divides history up into various serial modes of production. These modes of production are characterized by both the material means of production and the various relations of labor production in society. Marx calls his contemporary society capitalism, because production is dominated by production under the rule of capital, instruments made by human labor—therefore, under the domination of the capitalists, the owners of capital. As with Smith’s mercantilists, these capitalists will tend to have bad, self-serving ideas.

IMPLICATIONS OF MARX’S VIEW OF HUMAN NATURE

The implications are many; I shall be brief.

1. Humans, both as individuals and the human species, develop their capacities through time. Marx has the modern conception of human history as a sequence of evolution and development, not of cycles as the ancients believed.⁷ Hence, he writes in the *Grundrisse* that “human beings become individuals, only through the process of history” (496).⁸ Therefore,

⁷ See Spencer J. Pack, *Aristotle, Adam Smith and Karl Marx: On Some Fundamental Issues in 21st Century Political Economy* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2010), chaps. 3, 7, 10, 13.

⁸ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (1857–58), trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Random House, 1973); cited by title and page number hereafter.

“not only do the objective conditions change in the act of reproduction . . . but the producers change, too, in that they bring out new qualities in themselves, develop themselves in production, transform themselves, develop new powers and ideas, new modes of intercourse, new needs and new language” (*Grundrisse*, 494).

2. Hence, Marx may be seen as largely historicizing Aristotle so as to view humans as a species developing its character and capacities through historical time. Moreover, history for Marx is largely the working out of Aristotelian contradictions, not contraries: with birth, life, and death; with coming-to-be and passing-away.
3. We currently live in a social formation in which the process of production has mastery over humans, instead of the opposite. This is alienated labor. Hence, “just as man is governed, in religion, by the products of his own brain, so, in capitalist production, he is governed by the products of his own hand” (*Capital*, 772). This, of course, is the Feuerbachian critique of religion in general and Christianity in particular, applied by Marx to economics and the production process.
4. Capital, owned by the capitalists, is past accumulated labor which rules over workers. Capital, dead, alienated labor, acts like a vampire, sucking the life out of living labor (*Capital*, 342).
5. Hence it is crucially important to study workers: how they work, and under what material and social conditions they work. Much of Marx’s *Capital* is about the labor process, and the changing labor processes under the capitalist mode of production. History itself is one of successive modes of production with changing fundamental relations of production: master/slave, lord/serf, and so on. In addition, “relics of bygone instruments of labor [i.e., capital] possess the

same importance for the investigation of extinct economic formations of society as do fossil bones for the determination of extinct species of animals" (*Capital*, 286).

FUNDAMENTAL AMBIGUITIES IN MARX'S WORK

What Is Natural?

Marx generally insisted, particularly against Smith and his economist followers, that humans live in a social, not a natural world. So, for example, Marx writes that "gold and silver, in and of themselves, are not money. Nature does not produce money any more than it produces a rate of exchange or a banker" (*Grundrisse*, 239). Yet he also claimed in *Capital* that there are natural laws of capitalist production, and "it is the ultimate aim of this work to reveal the economic law of motion of modern society" (*Capital*, 92). His standpoint is one in "which the development of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of *natural history*" (*Capital*, 92, emphasis added).

Ultimately, Marx desired a society that is grounded on "production by freely associated men, and stands under their conscious and planned control. This, however, requires that society possess a material foundation, or a series of material conditions of existence, which in their turn are the *natural and spontaneous* product of a long and tormented historical development" (*Capital*, 173, emphasis added). So history up to Marx's day was basically natural and spontaneous. He wanted current history to be succeeded by the domain of human reason, by conscious democratic control of society. Thus, Marx historicizes Aristotle (and Plato), such that reason comes into its own through human history. Marx's goal was to replace Smith's "invisible hand," and Hegel's "cunning of reason," with conscious, explicit human reason.

Marx and Economic Determinism

Marx, of course, was not a strict economic determinist, but he sometimes appeared so, especially in *Capital*. This is partly because in that work, the characters, particularly the capitalists, are caricatures or ideal types.⁹ Hence, “individuals are dealt with here only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, the bearers of particular class-relations and interests” (*Capital*, 92). In addition, there is frequently a mechanical side to Marx’s exposition, where, for example, “capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a natural process, its own negation. This is the negation of the negation,” which will “establish individual property on the basis of the achievements of the capitalist era; namely co-operation and the possession in common of the land and the means of production, produced by labor itself” (*Capital*, 929).

Marx emphasized that the laws of motion of the capitalist mode of production lead to the rise of big business due to various economies of scale, together with a long-run fall in the average rate of profit. These phenomena increase the fragility of the capitalist socioeconomic system, where economic crises will necessarily get worse over time. Ultimately, the system must be replaced.

Yet, on the other hand, particularly in Marx’s more journalistic and political writings, and in his own political life and activities, it is clear that Marx was no strict determinist. As he famously wrote in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, “men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstance, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”¹⁰ In these more political writings Marx goes into great detail on the

⁹ This was a common practice of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century economists. See Mary S. Morgan, *The World in the Model: How Economists Work and Think* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), chap. 4.

¹⁰ Karl Marx, *On Revolution*, ed. and trans. Saul K. Padover (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), 245.

complexities of his times. So he repeatedly predicts that there will necessarily be a communist revolution. Yet he also wants to help bring about that revolution. He is an activist, and sees himself as a sort of midwife to the revolution, to the birth of a new, better mode of production.

Marx, Scientist or Prophet?

Thus, Marx saw himself as a scientist, getting to the essential truth of the current socioeconomic system, and discovering its natural laws of motion and development. Yet at the same time he kept prophesizing a communist revolution. For example, capitalism creates “the material conditions of production which alone can form the real basis of a higher form of society, a society in which the full and free development of every individual forms the ruling principle” (*Capital*, 739). And he writes of “the class whose historical task is the overthrow of the capitalist mode of production and the final abolition of all classes—the proletariat” (*Capital*, “Postface to the Second Edition,” 98). He claims that “the growing incompatibility between the productive development of society and its hitherto existing relations of production expresses itself in bitter contradiction, crises, spasms. The violent destruction of capital not by relations external to it, but rather as a condition of its self-preservation” (*Grundrisse*, 749–50). Presumably, this tension can be resolved by assuming that Marx thought he saw and understood the past and present developments of human history so deeply, profoundly, and clearly that he could accurately predict the future. Perhaps. Nonetheless, Marx’s much less than accurate predictions for the future have encouraged readers (and nonreaders!) to judge his critique of capitalism in light of the disappointing failure of his predictions. After all, if the predicted proletariat-led communist revolutions did not lead to a better, higher form of society; indeed, if they have all been to a greater or

lesser extent disappointments—then why study Marx? Many have supposed that the apparent failure of his predictions necessarily vitiates his critique of capitalism. Which, of course, is logically quite wrong.

RESULTS

The results of Marx's historical, materialist analysis, in some ways based on Aristotle's analyses (including the ontological question of what differentiates humans from other living creatures) and in other ways not, are many. Here I will mention just a few.

1. Marx emphasizes the development of a two-class society. There are the relatively few, rich capitalists, owners of capital. Capital, having in the past been created by workers, is now dead, alienated, embodied human labor. And then there is almost everyone else, the actual living laborers who are largely property-less and abjectly (or at best relatively) poor. There is basically no middle class. This facilitates the use of Aristotelian contradictions, of life and death, of coming-to-be and passing-away; not the development of Aristotelian contraries, since there is basically no middle ground.
2. Note that to some extent Marx is following up and answering Rousseau. One of the main things that gives so much tension to Rousseau's work is that all his recommendations in the field of government, education, and so on are clearly second-best solutions. For Rousseau, the best thing for the human species is (had been) the state of nature, or at least the state that the North American original peoples were in before the European invasion. Marx calls this the stage of primitive communism. He envisions a return to communism, but at a much higher level of material well-being; thus, in a sense, getting the best of both worlds. Thus, this is also a version of Hegel historicizing

Aristotle's idea that people ideally ought to develop their potentials to the fullest, the best, and so on. For Hegel and Marx, this development takes place largely within the human species over time. Marx though, famously inverts Hegel, from the emphasis on the development of the idea, reason, and so on to material development and hence material causes.

3. Since workers create all the value in Marx's theoretical system, then capitalist production is, in a deep sense, beneath the superficial realm of commercial exchange, a form of theft (*Capital*, 715, 728, 730, 761). Property income then is really embezzlement or appropriation or seizure of tribute by the capitalists, the owners of capital, from the workers, the producers of capital. If property income is essentially a form of theft from the workers, who are actually performing what differentiates humans from nonhuman animals, which has developed the species as a whole, then why not have a revolution and take back, resocialize that private property?

Of course, one major problem with this scenario, when this is done in practice, in the name of communism or international socialism, is that the former property owners will get extremely upset. So perhaps the revolutionists might as well kill them, since they will otherwise flee the country and be a source for the counterrevolution. This is a prime reason why Marx was not an anarchist. Marx called for a dictatorship of the proletariat—thus opening the door to Lenin, the supposed vanguard of the proletariat, and all that followed down that failed path.

4. Another historical option has been for radical opponents of Marxist international socialism to turn to some form of national socialism. Rather than seizing the property from the capitalists as a class, they take the property from the nonnationals, people residing in the country but not really

part of “the nation.” These are the people seen as the ultimate oppressors of “the nation.” However, again, if you are going to take their property, they will get upset; you might as well just kill them. This line of reasoning and then action led to the destruction of European Jewry.¹¹ The current rise in nationalism in various parts of the world portends future possibilities and variants along this destructive line.

5. The call and threat of a communist revolution, and appropriation of property from the property owners, could lead and indeed has led to reforms, often led by capitalists, or representatives of capitalists themselves. Arguably, this is what has led to the creation of the liberal welfare state. Now, in the twenty-first century, with the threat of a communist revolution so diminished, capitalist arguments for the need of a liberal welfare state are much weaker. Hence, there are currently strong forces and interests pursuing limiting, as well as ultimately dismantling and destroying, the liberal welfare state. To the extent this happens, Marx’s nineteenth-century analysis of capitalism under the preliberal welfare state could become more germane than ever.
6. Finally, what happens if due to advances in computers, artificial intelligence, robotics, and so on, we really do go to a more or less fully automated society? This, again, is something Marx suggested could happen. So, he wrote in the *Grundrisse*, “for capital, the worker is not a condition of production, only work is. If it can make machines do it, or even water, air, so much the better” (498). If we did get to a more or less fully automated society—how could the capitalist mode of production exist? For then “the *theft of alien labor time, on which the present*

11 Facilitated and encouraged by centuries of Christian anti-Jewish and racist thought. See e.g. David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: Norton, 2013), particularly chaps. 6 and 13.

wealth is based, appears a miserable foundation in face of this new one, created by large-scale industry itself. As soon as labor in the direct form has ceased to be the great well-spring of wealth, labor time ceases and must cease to be its measure, and hence exchange value [must cease to be the measure] of use value. The *surplus labor of the mass* has ceased to be the condition for the development of general wealth, just as the *non-labor of the few*, for the development of the general powers of the human head. With that,” claims Marx, “production based on exchange value breaks down” (*Grundrisse*, 705, emphases in original). Would this then necessitate the end of the capitalist system? (With no jobs, how would the ex-proletarians get access to the means of life?) With this scenario, does the specter of communism, or least a very different postcapitalist society, once again return to haunt our capitalists and their political representatives? I, for one (particularly in this capitalist age of life-threatening anthropocene climate change), certainly hope so.

I thank André Lapidus for his valuable comments on an earlier version of this essay.

CHAPTER 10

Heidegger on Human Being

THE LIVING THING HAVING LOGOS

Katherine Withy

Only the common interpretation of the definition of the essence of the human as the *zōon logon echon* seems to me to be shallow. Yet if we finally learn to think that *logos* originally means gathering, then the definition of the human with regard to *logos* says that its essence consists in being in the gathering.

—MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *Country Path Conversations*

Martin Heidegger's vision of human being has had an outsized influence on how subsequent European philosophers (and some Anglo-American philosophers) have theorized human nature. Any philosophical approach to human nature commits itself to a basic model of what sort of thing we are, and this model first establishes the sorts of questions that we can and should ask about being human. If we take ourselves to be organized sets of capacities, then we ask which of our capacities are distinctive and how they interact with the others. If we are bodies endowed with consciousness, then we puzzle about how matter comes to be minded. If we are likenesses of a creator, then we

question how we approximate to and deviate from the divine. Since all of these philosophical models are familiar to us from the western philosophical tradition, we can recognize the questions that arise from them as intelligible philosophical questions. They may even strike us as important philosophical questions. But if a model of human being is radically new, then the philosophical questions that it raises will strike us differently: as unintelligible or irrelevant—or as penetrating and revolutionary. Reactions to Heidegger's thought typically fall squarely in one camp or the other. Heidegger is often, and rightly, taken to offer a strikingly new model for thinking about what we are and so to open up an entirely novel set of philosophical questions about being human.¹

Heidegger does not call us "human beings" but instead *Dasein* (usually: "existence"). "Dasein" is frequently presented as a new way of thinking what we are by contrasting it with an isolated, interior subject, which is taken to be the standard post-Cartesian model for the human being. Instead of thinking us as residing in an "inner sphere," which we transcend to encounter objects, Heidegger thinks *Dasein* as "being-in-the-world": "always 'outside' amid entities which it encounters and which belong to a world already discovered" (SZ, 62, translation modified).² Rather than rehashing this approach, however, I want to take a different one—and one that emphasizes less Heidegger's departure from the western tradition and more his attempt to recover and reappropriate (alleged) ancient Greek, and particularly Aristotelian, insights. In thinking us as *Dasein*, Heidegger takes up Aristotle's definition of the human being as *zōon logon echon*, the living thing having *logos* (traditionally: reason, speech). Showing Heidegger's proximity to

1 The epigraph to this essay is from Martin Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, trans. Bret Davis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 145. Translation modified and Greek transliterated.

2 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 62. Hereafter SZ. Page references are to the marginal pagination, which reflects the pagination of the eighth German edition. I modify the translation to lowercase the translators' "Being."

the tradition, however, sets in even starker relief his deviation from it. For he has a new and distinctive take on what it is to be—and what is philosophically interesting about being—the living thing having *logos*.

Since this is a book on the human, I must acknowledge that there is some dispute about whether, or to what extent, Heidegger is talking about the human being. “Dasein” usually means more or less what “existence” means in English. Heidegger restricts the scope of the term, however, so that it refers to the “entity which each of us is” (SZ, 7). But if Dasein is each of us, then who are we? Does “we” include children? Not before a certain stage of development, it seems, since Heidegger takes Dasein to be already fully socialized and linguistically competent. Does it include animals? Heidegger says no. He argues that nonhuman animals cannot do what it is that we distinctively do: understand being.³ So when Heidegger occasionally speaks of “human Dasein,” he is not newly excluding animals from the scope of “Dasein.” But “human Dasein” is not simply a pleonasm. As with Kant’s “practically rational agent,” “Dasein” seems to refer to something that is most familiar to us in or as human beings but that is not itself coextensive with “human being.”⁴

The safest starting point is to say that if “Dasein” refers to us, then it refers at least to Heidegger and his readers.⁵ But interpreters also debate exactly *how* “Dasein” refers to us. Some take “Dasein” to be a count noun, so that each of us is a Dasein, just as you and I are each a person or a human being. This reading makes sense of Heidegger’s

3 See especially Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), e.g., 264. Hereafter FCM.

4 Sometimes in his later thought, Heidegger speaks of “the human being” (*der Mensch*) and “humankind” (*das Menschentum*), but in a way that restricts the referent to western human being (e.g., Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin’s Hymn “The Ister,”* trans. William McNeill and Julia Davis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 43). Addressing this would require addressing the political dimension of Heidegger’s thought in the 1930s and 1940s, which I cannot do here.

5 I borrow this approach from Wayne Martin, “The Semantics of ‘Dasein’ and the Modality of *Being and Time*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger’s “Being and Time,”* ed. Mark A. Wrathall (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 117.

insistence that to address Dasein “one must always use a *personal* pronoun . . . : ‘I am,’ ‘you are’” (SZ, 42), since we use personal pronouns to refer to distinct individuals. But, as John Haugeland has pointed out, Heidegger almost never uses “Dasein” as a count noun. (And the odd occasions when he does speak of “a Dasein” or plural “Daseins” are rare enough to look like mistakes.)⁶ Notice that to say that Dasein is the “entity which each of us is” (SZ, 7) or “that entity which in each case we ourselves are” (SZ, 196) is not to say that *each* of us is a *Dasein* but that we are *each Dasein*. Haugeland makes sense of this through the grammatical analogy of tuberculosis: “we neither count ‘tuberculosis’ nor measure amounts of it,” as we would were it a count noun or a mass noun; “it comes, rather, in distinct occurrences or cases (which can, of course, be counted).”⁷ Each of us is thus like a case of tuberculosis: a case of Dasein. Dasein, in turn, is like tuberculosis: “the overall phenomenon, consisting entirely of its individual ‘occurrences,’ and yet prerequisite for any of them being what it is.”⁸

Taylor Carman rightly points out that the German *je*, translated as “each” or “in each case,” can also be translated as “always.”⁹ If Dasein is not “the entity that in each case we ourselves are” but instead “the entity which we *always* ourselves are,” then it does not make sense to distinguish cases of Dasein from Dasein. Yet, if *we* are always Dasein, then “Dasein” seems to refer to all of us together rather than to each of us. But it is not some sort of collective term. Heidegger speaks of “the Dasein in us” (e.g., FCM, 283) as if Dasein were not something that we each or all *are* but something that we each and all *have*. He also speaks of this Dasein as something that we must take over, become, or return

6 John Haugeland, “Heidegger on Being a Person,” in *Dasein Disclosed: John Haugeland’s Heidegger*, ed. Joseph Rouse (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 9. This essay was originally published in *Noûs* 16/1 (1982).

7 Haugeland, “Heidegger on Being a Person,” 9.

8 Haugeland, “Heidegger on Being a Person,” 10.

9 Taylor Carman, “Is Dasein People? Heidegger According to Haugeland,” *Boundary 2: An International Journal of Literature and Culture* 41 (2014): 206.

to (e.g., FCM, 351). In that case, however, Dasein is not something that we *always* are but something that we are *not yet* and to which we must aspire.

Perhaps it is best to say that Dasein is *both* something that we always are *and* something that we must become. Compare the young shoot, which *is* a daffodil (in essence or form) and yet must still *become* a daffodil (as its *telos*). This general condition is familiar to us from Plato and Aristotle. On this sort of reading, “Dasein” would refer to our essence—and, in some of Heidegger’s own formulations, it does.¹⁰ Our essence is *what* we are, or our “what-being,” and so is an aspect of our being (along with our “that-being”—i.e., existence; and our “how-being”—i.e., accidents). To say that “Dasein” refers to our essence, then, is to say that it refers (synecdochally) to our way of being (e.g., SZ, 25, FCM, 63). But if Dasein is our essence or being, then it cannot be *the entity* that we (each) are, since essences are not entities. Heidegger draws a sharp distinction between entities and their (what-, that-, and how-)being, calling this distinction “the ontological difference.”¹¹ It seems that, to respect this difference, “Dasein” must refer to either an entity or a way of being. Yet Heidegger uses it to designate both an entity (e.g., SZ, 7, 11, 12, 196) *and* that entity’s way of being or essence.

Does the term then refer ambiguously? If so, it would resemble the English “human being,” which can refer to: an individual human being (“a human being”), human beings in general (“the human

10 For example: “the essence (*Wesen* in the verbal sense) of the human being, ‘the Dasein in the human being’”; Martin Heidegger, “On the Question of Being,” trans. William McNeill, *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 300; “‘the Dasein in man’ is the essence that belongs to Being itself. Man belongs to that essence in such a way that he has to be such Being. *Da-sein* applies to man. As his essence, it is in each case his, what he belongs to, but not what he himself makes and controls as his artifact. Man becomes essential by expressly entering into his essence”; Martin Heidegger, “Nihilism and the History of Being,” trans. David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi, in *Nietzsche: Volume III: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics, Volume IV: Nihilism*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 218.

11 E.g., Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 17.

being,” “the human being as such”), or the essence (“humanity”) or way of being of human beings (“human being”). (The title of my essay trades on this ambiguity.) But perhaps instead of saying that these terms refer ambiguously, we should say that they refer distinctively. For it is not obvious that reference must respect the ontological difference. Indeed, “being is always the being of an entity” (SZ, 9), in that be-ing is nothing other than some entity’s distinctive “going about” by virtue of which it is that, what, and how it is. Since entities and their being are not different *entities*, a term can refer to both without being ambiguous. Such a term would refer to an *entity* but would do so *ontologically*: by picking out that entity’s distinctive way of being. Such referring would cut across the ontological difference, in precisely the way Heidegger’s term “Dasein” seems to do. Thus Heidegger: “we have chosen to designate this entity as ‘Dasein,’ a term which is purely an expression of its being” (SZ, 12).

Heidegger’s reasoning for this ontico-ontological referring sheds light on the work that he thinks it does. He appeals to the fact that Dasein’s essence is not a “what” but is something that, in each case or always, it has to be (*zu sein hat*) (e.g., SZ, 12, 42).¹² While these passages are very difficult to interpret, I take the point to be this: most entities have their essences simply given to them, but Dasein’s essence is given to it as a task or challenge that it must take up.¹³ The daffodil must of course aim at being what it is and can be impeded from achieving this, but it cannot help but be on the way to being a daffodil. Dasein, in contrast, can—while still being itself in essence or form—fail to be on the way to its *telos* as Dasein. Achieving its *telos* is a challenge that it can misconstrue or even ignore. Aristotle seems to recognize this

12. These passages are the source of Jean-Paul Sartre’s existentialist dictum “essence precedes existence”; *Existentialism is a Humanism*, trans. Carol Macomber, ed. John Kulka (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 20). Sartre’s point is of course very different from Heidegger’s.

13. This idea is familiar to us from the humanistic tradition. While Heidegger is sharply critical of humanism in his “Letter on ‘Humanism,’” his concern with it there is that “it does not set the *humanitas* of the human being high enough”; Martin Heidegger, “Letter on ‘Humanism,’” trans. Frank A. Capuzzi, in McNeill, *Pathmarks*, 251.

feature of us, since he offers a separate practice—an ethics—to help human beings (but not daffodils) on the way to their *telos*. Heidegger designates us as entities subject to such an ethical-ontological task by calling us “Dasein.” Designating us in this way serves to call us to that task, making this an instance of oracular or vocational naming.

A field of philosophical questions about us immediately opens up. What is the task of being Dasein? What is it to properly take up that task? In what ways can we fail to take it up (properly)? These ethical-anthropological questions are not the primary questions of Heidegger’s philosophizing, since his project is ontological. Heidegger seeks the meaning of being. But, as I will show, working out (the question of) the meaning of being requires as its first step answering these questions about what it is to be us.

Heidegger follows Aristotle in taking us to be the *zōon logon echon*, the living thing having *logos*. Aristotle’s definition is most familiar as the claim that we are the rational animal (*animal rationale*). But Heidegger rejects this translation and the interpretation embedded in it. First, Dasein is not an animal. There is, of course, some sense in which Dasein is living.¹⁴ Living entities are unlike inanimate entities in that they are open to the world, and Dasein is open to the world. But Dasein’s being-in-the-world is fundamentally different from the animal’s being open to the world, which Heidegger calls its being “captivated with” its environment (FCM, 239). The animal is open only to whatever environmental stimuli engage its drives, and only insofar as they engage its drives, whereas we are open to the very fact *that* things are, as well as to *what* they are (and *how* they are). (This is why the animal does not and cannot wonder at the fact that there is something rather than nothing—or be reprimanded for mistaking, for example, what a stick is to be used for.) Thus animal life cannot be the same

14 E.g., Martin Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, trans. Robert D. Metcalf and Mark B. Tanzer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 14, 16, 36; see SZ 246.

as Dasein's life. The sense in which Dasein is living remains a serious problem (SZ, 194) (as does the nature of its embodiment; SZ, 108), but we begin in error if we conflate it with the animal's living.

The second reason that the *zōon logon echon* is not the rational animal is that *logos* is not reason. Reason is certainly one possible meaning of *logos*, but the semantic scope of this term also includes: word, thought, language, speaking, proverb, conversation, report, story, speech, deliberation, account, calculation, relation, analogy, and ground.¹⁵ Heidegger associates *logos* not with reasoning but with speaking: the living thing having *logos* is the entity that talks or discourses.¹⁶ But to say that Dasein speaks "does not signify that the possibility of vocal utterance is peculiar to it, but rather that it is the entity which is such as to discover the world and Dasein itself" (SZ, 165, translation modified). Having *logos* is the distinctive way in which Dasein is open to the world.

Heidegger connects *logos* as speaking to discovering, and so being open, by appealing to Aristotle's characterization (in *On Interpretation*) of *logos* as apophantic. The Greek term *apophainesthai* (showing, declaring) indicates that *logos* "lets something be seen (*phainesthai*), namely what the discourse is about" (SZ, 32, Greek transliterated) and it does so *from* (*apo*) "the very thing which the discourse is about" (SZ, 32). In plainer language: speaking "makes manifest what it is talking about, and thus makes this accessible to the other party" (SZ, 33). This is how speaking is "the way we reveal and illumine (both for ourselves and for others) the world and our own Dasein."¹⁷

15 LSJ, s.v. "*logos*." Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Lexicon: Abridged from Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

16 See, e.g., Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, 15–16 *et passim* and SZ, 25, 32, 165.

17 Martin Heidegger, *Logic: The Question of Truth*, trans. Thomas Sheehan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 6 (translation modified). It follows that the question of the truth of what we say is a question of how, and the extent to which, what we say uncovers what it speaks about. Heidegger takes being true qua being uncovering to be more fundamental than being true as corresponding. He finds support for this interpretation in the Greek term for truth, *alētheia*, which literally means unforgetting and which Heidegger interprets as unconcealing.

Apophantic speaking reveals or uncovers entities by virtue of having the structure of *synthesis* (combining) and *diairesis* (dividing). To keep things simple, I will discuss only the former. The synthetic character of *logos* is underscored by the related verb *legein*, the core meaning of which is “to gather.”¹⁸ To say that speaking is gathering or synthetic is to say that it lets “something be seen in its *togetherness* with something—letting it be seen *as* something” (SZ, 33). In speaking, we bring an entity together with—synthesize or gather it together with—some other entity: a predicate.¹⁹ Thus, the statement “this is a daffodil” synthesizes or gathers *this* with *daffodil*. In doing so, it shows the entity *as* a daffodil. In showing the entity *as* a daffodil, speaking as gathering or synthesizing uncovers the entity as what it is. Heidegger calls this synthetic *taking* “the as-structure.”

In speaking, we uncover entities *as* they *are*—not only in their what-being but also in their that-being and how-being.²⁰ “The daffodils are here!” uncovers the entities *as there* (in the way that belongs to daffodils), and “This daffodil smells wonderful” presents it in its *how*: as wonderful-smelling. Thus speaking uncovers entities in their being. To speak, then, is to reveal entities in their being by taking them *as* something or other in an act of synthesizing or gathering. We gather entities *together* with their predicates and in doing so gather them *into* their being as that, what, and how they are.

We gather entities together and so reveal them in their being not only when we speak but in everything that we do. Whether what we do is linguistic, theoretical, practical, artistic, imaginative, or what have you, it is something that *we* do, as cases of Dasein, insofar as it

18 Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 131. LSJ (abridged) lists “to gather, pick up” under the second meaning of *legō*. The first meaning is “to lay,” and the third is “to reckon, recount.”

19 Heidegger, *Logic*, 138.

20 While we can also uncover entities *as* what they are *not*, this possibility of falsity, semblance, or concealing is a modified form of, and so depends on, the more primary phenomenon of uncovering entities *as* something.

is gathering. Linguistic, theoretical, artistic, and other forms of gathering presuppose the gathering of our everyday, practical navigation of the world. In practically navigating the world, I gather entities not in speech but in how I engage with them. I take this *as* a flower when I avoid trampling on it; I take it *as* a daffodil when I arrange it with other daffodils in a vase; I take it *as* sweet-smelling when I extract its oil for use in a fragrance. If no predication is required for such practical takings-as, then in what way do they gather?

To take entities *as* that, what, and how they are in practical comporting is not to predicate but to contextualize. I gather entities together with other practically relevant entities in a practical context. I take the daffodil *as* a sweet-smelling flower when I engage with it in the practical context of other flowers, weeds, vases, gardening equipment, equipment for making essential oils, and so on. Were I to situate it in relation to other entities—say, lycorine, salivation, paralysis, and dermatitis, perhaps—it would be revealed *as* a different sort of thing: a poison. Insofar as both contexts do in fact allow the entity to reveal itself, neither is wrong and the entity is both/either a poison and/or a sweet-smelling flower. But we could take the entity *as* something that it *is* not by miscontextualizing it. Thus when supermarkets place daffodils or daffodil bulbs in the midst of their produce sections, we are prompted to contextualize them in terms of edible plants, and many people mistakenly take them *as* food.²¹ In either case, we (mis)take things *as* that, what, and how they are by gathering them in contexts with other entities. Things *are* (revealed as) that, what, and how they are only in such contexts.

Heidegger calls the context(s) in terms of which entities make sense as that, what, and how they are “the world” (SZ, Division I, Chapter III). While he tends to speak of the world in the singular, we

21 Daffodil bulbs can be mistaken for onions and the leaves of the flower for garlic chives. What makes these *mistakes* is that daffodil bulbs and leaves do not fit completely and comfortably in the context of edible plants: they may visually resemble edible plants but they will turn out to be toxic rather than nourishing (as edible plants are supposed to be).

can distinguish local worlds: the world of the supermarket, the culinary world, the toxicological world, the world of the gardener. Some of these worlds overlap and implicate one another in complex ways, which Heidegger does not theorize. Let us just say, then, that entities are taken *as* that, what, and how they are by being located within—gathered up, and contextualized in terms of—a world. To say that Dasein is being-in-the-world is to say that we are familiar with and know how to move about in such contexts. Such being-in-the-world is having *logos*.

We can now understand why Heidegger needs to pursue his ontological project by analyzing us, the entity that has *logos*. As gathering, we are the entities that uncover entities in their being and so to whom the being of entities (including our own being) is manifest. To understand what it means to be, Heidegger must understand what is made manifest when we reveal entities in their being, and this in turn requires understanding how we reveal entities in their being—how we gather, or “have *logos*.”

We can also see that “gathering” is the focal meaning of “*logos*.” We know that *speaking*, and so *language*, is a matter of gathering in terms of predicates or *words*. As predicative judging, *thinking* or *thought* can be understood as a similar sort of gathering. *Reasoning* and *conversing* are plausibly compounded forms of thinking and speaking—gatherings of gatherings—in which entities are contextualized not in terms of isolated predicates but in terms of other predicative judgments and sentences. These gatherings in turn might count as *stories*, *proverbs*, *conversations*, *speeches*, *reports*, or *accounts*, insofar as they show that, what, and how entities are by placing them in narrative, explanatory, or argumentative contexts. (Thus Heidegger once glossed Aristotle’s *zōon logon echon* as “living thing that reads the newspaper.”)²² To gather things into explanatory contexts is to give a *reason* or *ground* for them. To gather a general

22. Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, 74.

reason for acting (the major premise) with the details of our situation (the minor premise) is to *deliberate* or *calculate* what to do. And to *calculate* mathematically is to gather units together—perhaps by adding, or by bringing them into some other *relation* (such as a *ratio*)—just as we do in thinking when we bring two things together in *analogy*. The diverse senses of *logos* are united as forms of gathering. To have *logos*, then, is not to be rational but to be gathering.

If entities are what, that, and how they are by virtue of being gathered into contexts, and if we are entities, then we must also be gathered. Or rather: we must gather *ourselves*. We do this at two related “levels,” each of which is—and the two together are—the condition of possibility of our gathering other entities into contexts. This foundational gathering is the task of being us—the challenge of being the entity that has *logos*—to which we are called and which we can take up well or poorly.

Notice that a world or a practical context is, and is what and how it is, only in relation to human practices. The world of gardening is grounded in practices of cultivating and enjoying (edible, beautiful, or useful) plants. The world of toxicology is (and is what and how it is) on the basis of practices of identifying and treating exposure to toxins. Thus when practices are no longer practiced (e.g., forest gardening, in some parts of the world), their worlds die, and entities can no longer *be* in terms of them. So, too, when new practices are developed (such as genetic engineering), new worlds open up and entities can *be* in new ways (e.g., as transgenic organisms).

Practices come into being (or pass away) when cases of Dasein take up (or no longer take up) particular practical identities. Practical identities are ways of living out our lives, such as a being a gardener, a doctor, a farmer, or a geneticist. In any given case, a practical identity will be available to us only if the practice is living, yet the practice can be living only if cases of Dasein take up the relevant practical identity. To take up a practical identity is to take ourselves *as* someone or other. (Heidegger calls this “projecting our being onto a possibility”; SZ, sec.

32.) Just as we take a daffodil *as* a flower by contextualizing it in terms of other flowers and gardening phenomena, so too we take ourselves *as* that, what, and how we are by contextualizing ourselves in terms of other cases of Dasein who take up practical identities. In short, we position ourselves in social space.

Taking up a position in social space is not a matter of simply declaring ourselves to be *x* or *y*, since declaring “I am a gardener” or “I am a doctor” does not make it so. As a precondition, certain states of affairs must obtain: biological situations, historical conditions, institutional relationships, social recognition, and so on. Beyond these, what really makes it so (according to Heidegger) is my competence (SZ, 143) in navigating the social-practical context associated with that particular identity—actually being able to *be* a doctor or a gardener. This competence or “ability-to-be” (*Seinkönnen*) is most plain when it is lacking or lost: when I no longer know how to go about *being* a gardener (“What does it even mean to be a gardener anymore?!”) or when I have just taken up gardening and so am a person who gardens but do not yet have the fluidity to count *as* a gardener. I may not yet be able reliably to distinguish flowers from weeds, I may not know how to use the secateurs (or what they are), or I may not know how to ask the right questions at the local gardening store. Becoming and being a gardener do not consist in acquiring or possessing information but in acquiring and exercising the skill of living out my life *as* a gardener. One acquires this skill through practice and imitation—just as one acquires Aristotelian virtue. And, just like Aristotelian virtue, my ability to be who I am is stable but must constantly be exercised. Exercising it is my taking myself *as*—and so, being—who I am. It is my inhabiting the world that my practical identity opens up, in the context of which I can gather particular entities and uncover them as that, what, and how they are.

The foundational identity into which I gather myself, however, is not that of a particular practical identity but that of being the sort of thing that I am: being Dasein (SZ, 143), the living thing having *logos*—that is, the entity who gathers itself and other entities and so uncovers itself and

them in their being. What of myself do I gather together so that I am gathered into my being as Dasein? We know that taking up the project of being Dasein is a task or a challenge that is given to us, and that we can in some sense fail to meet that challenge. I will come at the question of what it is to gather ourselves into our being as Dasein by looking at how we respond poorly to the task of doing so. Being a poor gatherer will manifest itself at all three levels of gathering: not only (1) gathering ourselves into our being as Dasein but also (2) gathering ourselves into some particular identity and (3) gathering entities into their being.

In *Being and Time*, inauthentic or unowned (*uneigentlich*) Dasein (3) contextualizes entities in a way that amounts to “uprooting” (SZ, 170) them. Consider, for example, how inauthentic Dasein speaks. When we are inauthentic, most of what we say is some form of cliché. We follow the regular course of small talk; we characterize the situation as someone of our political leaning would; we form our “well-informed” opinions of the global situation by reading the blogs and passing along the opinions we find there. In so “passing the word along” (SZ, 168, original italicized), we are certainly speaking and so gathering entities together with predicates, into explanatory contexts, and so on. But those predicates and contexts have their source in *what one says* and their authority in the fact that “one says so” (SZ, 168). Our speaking takes the lead from this “one” rather than from what we are talking about (see SZ, 32). It is thus uprooting, and so poor apophantic gathering.

Similarly when we do *what one does*. The inauthentic gardener, for instance, looks to her neighbors and to gardening blogs to see *how one gardens*—what one plants, what tools one uses, what one wears, what one complains about and takes pride in, and so on. In all this, she is not taking her lead from the entities involved: from the local soil and climate, from the landscape and features of her particular gardening area, from her own level of interest, from her own history of failures and successes. Failing to take one’s lead from the entities in gardening is often

quite manifest, since it results in less than flourishing gardens—or in grotesque absurdities such as suburban lawns in desert landscapes. But often it is not so apparent, and it is important to keep this in mind in order not to caricature inauthenticity. Gardening *as one does* can express itself in planting according to a calendar rather than the conditions, in following the fads of lawn ornamentation, or in the idea that one simply must (not) wear gardening gloves.

We act and speak *as one does*, and so gather entities poorly, insofar as we (2) gather ourselves into immediately available practical identities: the suburban homeowner, the urban environmentalist, the amateur herbalist. These practical identities provide us with the norms governing what one says and does. We gather ourselves into them inauthentically insofar as our taking ourselves *as* such a person takes its lead from the “one” (*das Man*) rather than from the entity being gathered—in this case, we ourselves (SZ, 126, 128). This is to say that we take up these identities *because* that is what one does: when one lives in the suburbs, *one is* expected to *be* a suburban homeowner with a lawn (and *not* someone who would let the wildflowers grow). In this case, the expectation to take up this gardening identity rather than another might be explicitly enshrined in neighborhood association rules. But, more fundamentally, it is socially enforced—through, for example, the way the neighbors treat you, what is available to purchase at the local gardening store, and the wider network of norms governing who else one is and what else one does. (Perhaps in this neighborhood one plays lawn games, which means that one must be a lawn-haver and all that that entails.) In receiving our identities from others in this way, we live out our lives *as* “who one is.” We are not genuine selves but “one-selves” (or “they-selves,” SZ, 129).

Taking up an identity opens a world, the practical context that we navigate and into which we gather entities. Being a one-self gives our navigation of the world a particular character. Inauthentic Dasein is “driven about by its ‘affairs’” (SZ, 390), “absorbed in the everyday multiplicity and the rapid succession of that with which one is concerned”

(SZ, 322). It constantly passes from one immediate concern to another—the next must-have variety of rose, the latest violation of the neighborhood association rules, the upcoming afternoon of lawn games. Immersed in and driven about by what is immediately in front of it, inauthentic Dasein “has been dispersed into the many kinds of things which daily ‘come to pass’” (SZ, 389). So dispersing itself is a poor way of gathering itself. As I will show, it is a way for Dasein to try to be “rid of itself” (SZ, 172).

The self of which it is trying to rid itself is Dasein as such. Poured out into its immediate concerns, inauthentic Dasein poorly (1) gathers itself into its being as Dasein: “when one is absorbed in the everyday multiplicity and the rapid succession of that with which one is concerned, the Self of the self-forgetful ‘I am concerned’ shows itself as something simple which is constantly selfsame but indefinite and empty” (SZ, 322). The “I” of inauthentic Dasein’s practical concern is that of the normatively responsive agent: a locus of agency receptive to the push and pull of social norms. Even as a one-self, it has no content of its own, since the identities that it takes up are generic in the sense that anyone (and everyone) must be able to inhabit them.²³ This “I” gathers itself into such identities but is itself nothing more than that which carries out the gathering. Rendered epistemologically, it is the “I” of the “I think,” which spectates and unifies the parade of experiences (SZ, 319). Dasein as such is taken as the one-dimensional gatherer of all: the “I” of the “I bind together” (SZ, 319).

While an empty, normatively responsive agent can respond to the social norms that bind it, it is not clear how it can come to be bound by the particular norms that it is in the first place. Why is this instance of the “I bind” a gardener and that one a doctor? To account for the fact that cases of Dasein receive and take up particular practical identities,

23 There are, of course, constraints on who may inhabit particular identities. Yet these constraints do not belong to the agent *qua* agent but are located in, for example, biological or historical facts.

we need a more complex vision of Dasein as such. The “I” must be more than the “I” of the “I bind.” It cannot be a “bare taking cognizance of itself, such as accompanies all Dasein’s ways of behaving” but must be a “projecting oneself upon one’s current possibility of being-in-the-world” (SZ, 387).

To receive a practical identity is to accept it as given, and this requires being open to givens, as that with which one is already stuck. Authentic (*eigentlich*) Dasein is open to that which is given, and this allows it to (2) take up culturally available practical identities and gather itself in social space, and to do so in a way that takes the lead *from* itself rather than from the “one.” This is because it can “listen” to itself and find that, since it already inhabits certain identities, it already has certain commitments.²⁴ In being open to these givens, it is open to who it already is—and, in particular, to who it already takes itself to be trying to be. Heidegger personalizes and externalizes this given identity as authentic Dasein’s “hero” (SZ, 385). (Compare the virtuous person as an internalized role model.) While Heidegger says that authentic Dasein “chooses” its hero (SZ, 385), what he should say is that authentic Dasein is open to the hero that it already has. This is because choosing the hero actually amounts to listening out for a call, which “comes *from* me and yet *from beyond and over me*” (SZ, 275), *from* the hero *to* Dasein, calling it to live out its life in some particular way. In hearing this call, authentic Dasein receives what is given to it, from itself.

Dasein responds authentically to this call by taking itself *as* someone who lives in that particular way. This does not mean that it replicates the life or actions of its hero but rather that it lives in the *style* of the hero, expressing the same normative commitments in a way that makes sense in its particular situation. Imagine that your gardening hero is your grandmother, and that she was an amateur herbalist who tended a messy but vibrant half-acre of medicinal

24 That these givens come from practical identities previously taken up guarantees that no substantial self is here posited.

plants. To have your grandmother as your hero is to have received a sense of yourself as someone who should be a gardener like her. You are thus called to live out your life in that particular way. But to respond to this call authentically, you do not need to replicate your grandmother's garden. You do not even need to garden at all!²⁵ Perhaps you have no green thumb. Perhaps you live in a small, urban apartment. What is important is that you do not disregard your internalized hero and take your lead from *what one does* in that situation. (For an apartment-dweller, presumably *what one does* is garden as an interior decorator, by taking plants and flowers as decorative items that contribute to a "look.") Instead, you take up a gardening identity that retrieves and repeats that of your hero in your different circumstances. Perhaps you become a culinary herb-grower, or an amateur aromatherapist—or even a toxicologist. What makes these life paths creative repetitions of your hero's style of life is that they retrieve its core commitment—an attunement to the role of plants in health and wellness—and allow you to live out that commitment in a manner that is appropriate to your situation.

In taking up such an identity, authentic Dasein can see what needs to be done in its current situation (SZ, 299). In this, it is like Aristotle's *phronimos* (the practically wise person), insofar as the *phronimos* excels not in deliberating but in seeing what the situation calls for. What the situation calls for is a particular way of (3) gathering entities into practical contexts and so revealing them as that, what, and how they are. Because it is open to what is given, authentic Dasein can gather entities in a way that takes its lead both *from* itself and *from* the entities that are there. First, the practical context into which it gathers entities is not that of a generic practical identity but that of the retrieved legacy of the hero (say, the world of culinary herb gardening). On the

²⁵ Does this mean that you are not a gardener but some other sort of person? Perhaps. This strikes me as a minor terminological issue (unless an account of the individuation conditions for practical identities should reveal that something more significant is at stake). What matters for the point I am making is the continuity with the hero's legacy.

basis of this context, authentic Dasein can see what the situation calls for not from “one” but *from it*, as who it is. Second, authentic Dasein’s openness to givens includes an openness to given entities. It can thus take its lead *from* those entities in gathering them, and so is open to what *this situation* calls for from it, rather than responding to “the ‘general situation’” (SZ, 300) and gathering entities as one does. (It is because authentic Dasein reveals entities *as* they are and *from* the entities themselves that the project of ontology requires that authenticity be discussed—and, it would seem, that the persons undertaking it be authentic themselves.)

In receiving the legacy of the hero and carrying it forward as a way to live out its life, and in making sense of present entities in terms of it, authentic Dasein gathers together who it already is, who it is going forward as, and the entities in its present situation. This gathering is temporal: Dasein takes up a practical identity (future) that it has received (having been) and lives that out in the current situation (making present; see SZ, sec. 65). In this, Dasein as such is manifest as a (1) gathered unity of past, future, and present: “a future which makes present in the process of having been” (SZ, 326). Dasein as such is *futural* in that it must *go on* as someone in particular. It *has been* in the sense that it is stuck with certain givens from which it must start. It *makes present* in that it encounters entities by gathering them into their own being or presencing. The gathering of these three temporal elements is the (1) gathering of Dasein as such that makes possible Dasein’s (2) gathering itself into particular practical identities and its (3) gathering of entities, whether authentic or inauthentic.

So gathered, Dasein as such is not an empty, one-dimensional “I.” From a temporal perspective, the empty “I” of the “I bind” would be an aperture onto the eternal now-point of a timeline of continuous passage from the not-yet-now to the no-longer-now (see SZ, 430). In contrast, authentic Dasein’s way of being Dasein reveals that the “I” of Dasein as such is a gathered—or “incorporated” (*einbezogen*; SZ, 390–91)—dynamic unity of receiving, going forward, and making

present. Such an “I” is not simply the gatherer but also the gathered and self-gathering.

That Dasein as such is a self-gathering of temporality is why Heidegger’s investigation into being, which proceeds through an investigation of Dasein and its authenticity, is an investigation of time.

The challenge of being Dasein is that of gathering itself into its temporal unity. Inauthentic Dasein does this poorly. It takes up received practical identities and makes sense of entities, and so it counts fully as Dasein (see SZ, 43). But by receiving identities from the “one,” gathering entities as one does, and dispersing itself into immediate, practical concerns, inauthentic Dasein denudes itself of its temporal complexity. It lives as if Dasein as such were an empty, indeterminate “I”—an agent of gathering that is not itself gathered. Heidegger argues that this self-misunderstanding is motivated: inauthentic Dasein is attempting to evade the challenge of being Dasein (e.g., SZ, 184).

That inauthentic Dasein evades this challenge by pouring itself into present concerns and shearing the “I” of its received past shows that it finds security in the present and a threat in the past. Heidegger calls this threat “uncanniness” (SZ, 189, 344). Uncanniness is (more or less) the fact that Dasein is not (or no longer) in control of the givens from which it must start. “It has *not* laid that basis *itself*”; it “*never* [has] power over its ownmost being from the ground up” (SZ, 284, translation modified). In short, what is threatening to inauthentic Dasein is the very fact of having a past.

This is threatening because of what it does to the future: it introduces death. To die is no longer to be able to continue being who one is, whether in what we ordinarily call “death” (no-longer-Dasein; SZ, 236) or in no longer being able to go on as someone in particular. With regard to the former: the span of our lives is simply not up to us. We receive our existence as Dasein as a gift that can be taken away at any moment. With regard to the latter: sometimes we must give up who we are, perhaps because of changes in the material circumstances we

find ourselves stuck with, or perhaps because the call from the hero ceases to sound.²⁶ When the givens of our existence change in these sorts of ways, it becomes impossible to keep going forward as who we are. We die.

The always-open possibility that we might have to “*give up* some definite” way of living, or life itself, “in accordance with the demands of some possible situation or other” (SZ, 391, translation modified) makes Dasein constantly at issue for itself (e.g., SZ, 42, 192). It is this being-at-issue that inauthentic Dasein attempts to evade and to which authentic Dasein faces up. Authentic Dasein unifies rather than shears off its past and future and so integrates into itself the finitude in each. In particular, it “runs forward” into the future by being open to the possibility that things might be radically different. Inauthentic Dasein, in contrast, simply “await[s] the next new thing” (SZ, 391)—the next now-point, the next sense impression, the next immediately pressing concern. Its future is an endless series of more of the same, because it has immersed itself in the present of what one does and what one will continue, indefinitely, to do.

Heidegger does not explain why the fact that givens are, and so the future is, not under our control is so threatening. There is no obvious reason why the living thing that gathers should be a control freak. More investigation would be required to determine whether something about gathering is risked by self-gathering into a unity of (settled) past, (given) present, and (open) future. To determine this, we ask: What are death and uncanniness? Why and how does inauthentic Dasein flee them? What does authentic Dasein do differently? Does Heidegger’s account of Dasein’s temporality make sense? And who,

26 Or one’s material circumstances might change such that there is no longer any feasible way to take up one’s hero’s legacy intelligibly. See Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). For discussion of how the given entities we encounter can put our identities at stake, see John Haugeland, “Truth and Finitude: Heidegger’s Transcendental Existentialism,” in Rouse, *Dasein Disclosed*; originally published in *Heidegger, Authenticity and Modernity*, ed. Jeff Malpas and Mark Wrathall (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).

precisely, is Dasein, anyway? Pursuing these questions is a matter not just of interpreting Heidegger's texts but of interrogating the challenge of being us. The challenge of being Dasein is that of living out our lives as someone in particular, and so revealing the entities that we encounter as that, what, and how they are, while constantly being willing to "take it all back" (see SZ, 308). We must be the gatherer who is always prepared to unravel and start again. It is to this challenge that Heidegger calls us by calling us "Dasein."

Reflection

THE COMPULSION OF THE HUMAN

Ray Brassier



POSTHUMAN LIBERALISM

In the contemporary “critical” humanities, the privileging of the human has become as suspect as every other sort of privilege. Human exceptionalism is viewed as of a piece with the exclusionary logics of racism and sexism. Far from being the uncircumventable horizon for emancipatory politics, humanism is denounced as integral to a logic of domination that proceeds from the subjugation of nature to the enslavement of all those deemed less than human. Speaking on behalf of what she calls “the critical posthumanities,” Rosi Braidotti writes: “appeals to the ‘human’ are always discriminatory: they create structural distinctions and inequalities among different categories of humans, let alone between humans and non-humans.”¹

1 Rosi Braidotti, “A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 36 (2019): 31–61, 5. Braidotti defines “the critical posthumanities” as “a supra-disciplinary, rhizomic field of contemporary knowledge production that is contiguous with, but not identical to, the epistemic accelerationism of cognitive capitalism” (“Theoretical Framework,” 22). See also Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Oxford: Wiley, 2013), and *Posthuman Glossary*, coedited with Maria Hlavajova (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018). For representative surveys see Cary Wolfe, ed., *What Is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), and Richard Grusin, ed., *The Nonhuman Turn* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015). The Posthumanities series (of which Wolfe is editor) of the University of Minnesota Press has published fifty volumes so far.

It is easy to retort that this indictment of humanism follows from conflating the restrictive specification of the human (as white, male, heterosexual, European, etc.) with its generic despecification—the human as what Alain Badiou calls “the voided animal,”² an exception that includes the unspecified part of everything: neither white nor black, neither male nor female, neither heterosexual nor homosexual, and so on. But the suggestion that universalization proceeds not by generalizing specific predicates but by subtracting them tends to fall on deaf ears in a theoretical context where the Nietzschean equation of universalization with domination continues to hold sway. Once the inference from exception to exclusion is made, an all-inclusive posthumanism supplants exclusionary humanism as the politically “progressive” optic consonant with the liberal ideal of inclusiveness that has become the humanities’ critical lodestone. Here is Braidotti again:

posthuman scholarship . . . is contiguous and resonates with biogenetic and technologically-mediated advanced capitalism. What prevents it from being just an epistemic form of accelerationism? The answer is affirmative ethics, and the political praxis is collective counter-actualization of the virtual. The barrier against the negative, entropic frenzy of capitalist axiomatic is provided by the politics that ensue from the ethic of affirmation. The political starts with de-acceleration, through the composition of transversal subject assemblages that actualize the unrealized or virtual potential of what Deleuze calls ‘a missing people.’ In the old language: de-accelerate and contribute to the collective construction of social horizons of hope.³

2 See Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum 2009), 114.

3 Braidotti, *Posthuman Glossary*, 11.

Braidotti espouses Deleuze and Guattari's metaphysical definition of capitalism, according to which capitalist reterritorialization is the entropic residue of a primary deterritorialization synonymous with creative Life. But because it jettisons the crux of Marx's analysis of capital as the "moving contradiction" seeking to extract ever-increasing magnitudes of surplus labor from ever-decreasing amounts of necessary labor, this yields an equally metaphysical anticapitalism, wherein the premium on creative affirmation obviates the need to abolish the social forms shoring up this moving contradiction: private property, class, wage labor, and so on.⁴ By the same token, because it shares with its accelerationist sibling Deleuze and Guattari's metaphysical premium on creativity over reactivity, Braidotti's posthumanism is "critical" only insofar as it seeks to palliate rather than to celebrate the social consequences of capital's creative destruction. Braidotti's appeal to "unrealised or virtual potential" also jars with her Deleuzean commitments. Deleuze pits virtual and actual against Aristotle's potentiality and actuality.⁵ Where the latter are equal halves of equivocal being, the former constitute the unequal halves of univocal being. Thus where potentiality is not yet present, virtuality is unrepresentable. This equivocation underwrites Braidotti's invocation of "hope" in an as yet unrealized but present potential; a hope which supplants the imperative to abolish the social relations shoring up the boundary between the presentable and unrepresentable. Because it is wholly immanent to capital, the counteractualization of virtual potencies required by Braidotti's hope is effectively the cultivation of empowerment within existing social relations. Last but not least, it is not clear how a posthuman ethics that has banished negativity the better to affirm the immanence of what is could

4 On Marx, see also Pack's Reflection here.

5 On Aristotle, see also Deslauriers and Filotas, chapter 2 here.

recognize anything as “missing,” let alone a “people.” It seems telling that the categories in terms of which Braidotti identifies the “missing”—the indigenous, female, queer, otherwise enabled, and others—are identifications of the excluded acknowledged by capitalist neoliberalism, rather than indices of the unrepresentable capable of destroying its logic of incorporation (subsumption under value). What is “missing” for Braidotti is simply whatever is not yet included. And since capitalism has already subverted bourgeois humanism by personifying things (including corporations), the “social horizon of hope” for “a people to come” under capitalism reduces to the claim that the indigenous, feminist, queer, otherwise enabled, and so on are “people” just as much as things are.

Thus the logic of liberalism culminates with the ontological ratification of capitalism’s personification of things and reification of people in the formal equivalence of human and nonhuman. The ideological corollary of this logic is an “ethics of affirmation” that not only masks but consolidates capital’s subdivision of class into the ramifying fractures of race, gender, ethnicity, culture, and so on. But it is too easy to expose the conservative kernel beneath posthumanism’s radical veneer. Counteracting it requires more than abstractly opposing the generic despecification of the human to its restrictive specification. What must be shown rather is how both this specification and despecification are conjoined in capitalism as a historically specific mode of social reproduction. With this aim in mind, I want to contrast two ways in which the subversion of the human proceeds, from below and from above. I will focus particularly on the latter in order to argue that the exception of the human, its status as an ontological anomaly, is constituted by an unhuman element whose twin facets are revealed in the Freudian concept of the drive and in the Marxian concept of the commodity. The human exception is not due to any positive trait but follows from a “negative universality”: the fact that humans are compelled to produce and reproduce the means of their social existence.

SUBVERSION FROM BELOW

Humanism's subversion from below is straightforward: it consists in undermining any attempt to specify the difference between humans and other animals in terms of the capacity for language (the human is the talking animal), reason (the human is the rational animal), or politics (the human is the political animal). That language is a species of signaling, reasoning a species of reckoning, and politics a species of cooperation, reintegrates the differences that were taken to be constitutive of the human back into the continuum of biological capacities. The specificity of human difference reduces to specific capacities that humans share with other animals. But this renaturalization of the human assumes two very different forms in contemporary philosophical discourse. In mainstream Anglo-American philosophy, it follows from acknowledging the evolved nature of all the cognitive prowesses taken to be characteristically human.⁶ In Anglophone critical theory, by way of contrast, it proceeds from an animist metaphysics that conceives of all of nature as living.⁷ Thus we have two reductions of the human, one positivist, one animist.⁸ Where the positivist reduction seeks to explain how human mindedness arises from mindless but scientifically tractable processes, the

6 For an exemplary statement of this brand of philosophical naturalism, see Daniel C. Dennett, *From Bacteria to Bach and Back: The Evolution of Minds* (New York: Norton, 2017).

7 See for instance Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). See also Braidotti: "all matter or substance being one and immanent to itself, it is intelligent and self-organizing in both human and non-human organisms. . . . Vital matter is driven by the ontological desire for the expression of its innermost freedom (conatus)." Braidotti, "Theoretical Framework," 4.

8 Although it is customary to contrast positivism to naturalism, I use the term here to characterize all those varieties of philosophical naturalism for which current science delimits the scope of knowledge and culture is continuous with nature. Animism is also a variety of naturalism, but one that proceeds from a straightforwardly metaphysical conception of nature. The contrast between positivism and animism is not between naturalism and antinaturalism but between scientific and speculative naturalism. Both concur in stipulating an underlying continuity between culture and nature.

animist reduction rejects modern scientific “reductionism” and seeks instead to reunite culture and nature by attributing mindedness to everything. For those who embrace this second option, the ubiquity of mindedness (understood as sentience rather than sapience) follows from poststructuralism’s “decentering of the subject.” The destitution of the subject as “the I that is we and the we that is I,”⁹ which lies at the heart of philosophical modernity as elaborated by Kant and Hegel, entails the dissolution of anthropocentrism and the inception of a postmodern animism for which anthropomorphism is no longer an error but an enabling commitment.¹⁰

Scientific naturalism is more audacious: it rejects anthropomorphism as well as anthropocentrism. Subjectivity is a cognitively tractable natural phenomenon: it is (for example) the embedding of a transparent self-model within a representational system’s world-model.¹¹ Nevertheless, positivists and animists concur in rejecting Kant’s claim that the knowing subject is neither a substance (Descartes) nor a bundle of experiences (Hume) but an epistemic function that cannot be located within the world whose experience it renders possible. Kant desubstantializes

9 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Terry Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2018), 108.

10 See for instance Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: Towards an Anthropology beyond the Human* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, trans. Peter Skafish (Minneapolis: Univocal/University of Minnesota Press, 2017). Bruno Latour is perhaps the most significant precursor of this strand of posthumanist thought. See his *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). I have criticized Latour’s philosophical claims elsewhere: “Concepts and Objects,” in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Realism and Materialism*, ed. Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman (Melbourne: Re-Press, 2011), 47–65. On Kant, see also Tolley, chapter 9 here.

11 See for instance Thomas Metzinger, *Being No One: The Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Bradford Books, 2003). See also Metzinger, ed., *Conscious Experience* (Paderborn: Imprint Academic, Thorverton und mentis, 1995). My point here is not to endorse Metzinger’s account unconditionally (it too quickly glosses over the problem of the reality of appearances) but to flag its significance as an attempt to account for the phenomenon of first-personal subjective consciousness using the explanatory resources of contemporary natural science (specifically, neurobiology and cognitive neuroscience).

the subject by subtracting it from the reality it conditions. By reinscribing subjectivity within reality, both positivism and animism resubstantialize it. Animism does so directly by embracing panpsychism, understood as the claim that all things think. Positivism does so in a less direct but ultimately no less metaphysical fashion by reintegrating the scientific perspective into the reality it seeks to describe and explain. Science is not a “view from nowhere” but a particular perspective on reality embodied by organisms with specific biological histories and cognitive defaults. By collapsing Kant’s distinction between the causal aetiology of knowledge and its normative justification, both positivism and animism relativize their own cognitive claims in a manner that oscillates between empiricist skepticism and metaphysical perspectivism.¹² In either case, subjectivity is reified as both conditioning of and conditioned by the reality it knows.

SUBVERSION FROM ABOVE

The metaphysical short-circuit between conditioning and conditioned subjectivity is avoided by humanism’s subversion from above. It is a post-Kantian operation that seeks to evacuate the residue of substance in the transcendental subject. It does so by uncovering a conceptual keystone that correlates subject and object while dereifying both. This is no longer a reinscription of the human from below but a decentering from above that turns the human into the site of a difference more radical than any

12. The skeptical tendency is exhibited in the pessimistic metainduction and the claim that science can no longer lay claim to overarching unity. The perspectivist corollary is the suggestion that reality may have as many different facets as there are vocabularies for describing it. Both tendencies are discernible in recent philosophy of science: see for instance John Dupré, *The Disorder of Things: Metaphysical Foundations of the Disunity of Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), or Nancy Cartwright, *The Dappled World: A Study of the Boundaries of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

metaphysical difference. The human is no longer a different kind of being but the site of another kind of difference. But here again there are two distinct ways of characterizing this difference: as existence or as drive. In Heidegger's fundamental ontology, existence is not a specifiable property but a *seinkönnen*, a pure potentiality-to-be.¹³ Humans are unlike other entities because their way of being is characterized by a structure of temporal projection in which the past, the present, and the future are not successive but inseparable yet unpresentable. This structure is the wellspring of temporal transcendence: time, not eternity, is the source of transcendence, but one that is finite and human, as opposed to infinite and divine. This transcendence unfolds as the correlation of *Dasein* and *Sein*, existence and being. The source of this correlation lies in *Dasein*'s "preunderstanding" of being; a preunderstanding rooted in its practical comportment towards things. Fundamental ontology is the interpretation of the preunderstanding of being implicit in practical comportment.

This has two consequences. First, existence as transcendence unfolds within the bounds of sense. Second, Heidegger ontologizes sense while decoupling it from the senseless processes that shape practical comportment. Or rather, he subordinates the description and explanation of these senseless processes to the preunderstanding of sense. This idealist premium on sense is exacerbated by the later Heidegger's decoupling of being from existence, or event from comportment. But the ontologization of sense cannot be countered simply by affirming the primacy of comportment, recoded as practice. Practices unfold within social forms that can be idealized as horizons of meaning or symptomized as apparatuses of power. This alternative encapsulates the divide between post-Heideggerean pragmatism,

13 On Heidegger, also see Withy, chapter 10 here.

which emphasizes the primacy of being-in-the-world, and post-Nietzschean genealogy, which anatomizes the operations of power. But the more radical materialist counter to both the hermeneutics of sense and the metaphysics of power lies in the psychoanalytic concept of the drive (*trieb*). As compulsion to repeat, the drive is not just senseless but the instance articulating sense and senselessness. Mladen Dolar lucidly expresses the way in which the concept of the drive subverts every familiar metaphysical opposition, whether between the one and the many, freedom and necessity, or culture and nature:

the drive, libido, is not a One, it is not a substance; it possesses the key quality of the drive by the very impossibility of being substantialized and totalized. . . . Or in other words, we don't have two separate, independent and opposed areas [nature and culture], neatly localized and delimited, which would come into conflict with always unsatisfactory outcome. . . . Both nature and culture appear as non-all, not fully constituted, but held together by their impossible overlap [the drive]. We cannot simply oppose two massive totalities of nature and culture, for the Freudian notion of the drive can be seen as the concept the aim of which is ultimately to de-totalize the two, to undermine this very opposition and its self-evidence.¹⁴

On this psychoanalytic account, the exception of the human is not derived from the reflexive structure of existential transcendence, understood as the interpretation of understanding. The exception consists rather in the enigma of the drive as that which is prior to understanding but cannot be interpreted. As Jean Laplanche puts it: "the psychoanalytic method, in its originary moment, works not with [hermeneutic] keys but with screwdrivers. It dismantles locks,

14 Mladen Dolar, "Of Drives and Culture," *Problemi International* 1 (2017): 77–79.

rather than opening them. Only thus, by breaking and entering, does it attempt to get at the terrible and laughable treasure of unconscious signifiers.”¹⁵ Unconscious signification is the “terrible and laughable” obverse of ontological understanding. What is decisive here is the opposition between unconscious signification and implicit meaning. The drive at work in unconscious signification is neither the residue of nature in culture (of the object in the subject) nor the trace of culture in nature (of the subject in the object); it is this splitting itself, the disarticulation of the two. As such, the drive disrupts the consistency of nature, understood as the domain of instinct, as well as the integrity of culture, understood as the realm of the normative. In this regard, and as Dolar emphasizes, the concept of the drive subverts the post-Kantian opposition between the normative and the natural, or between reasons and causes. In one sense, the drive is the missing link between freedom and nature; in another sense, it is the dissolution of both. It is neither human nor nonhuman but both more and less than human: the unhuman core of the human.

But the danger of ontologization remains: not the ontologization of sense through existential transcendence but of the drive as aboriginal bifurcation of culture and nature. To posit the drive as aboriginal schism would be to posit it, as Hegel says, as “like a shot from a pistol.”¹⁶ The split is mediated by its extremities. Although not of the order of either culture or nature, the drive cannot be wholly abstracted from them. Dereifying it requires supplementing the psychoanalytic account with an account of the reciprocal mediation of culture and nature, but one that is not predicated upon a humanist hermeneutics of sense or a posthumanist metaphysics

¹⁵ Jean Laplanche, “Psychoanalysis as Anti-hermeneutics,” trans. Luke Thurston, *Radical Philosophy* 79 (1996): 12.

¹⁶ G. W. F. Hegel, “With What Must the Beginning of Science be Made?,” in *The Science of Logic*, trans. George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 45.

of power (or Life). Here lies the salience of Marx's historical materialism. Its key claim is that humans produce and reproduce the material conditions of their social existence. Thus the difference that separates humans from other animals is neither metaphysical nor transcendental: humans *make* the difference through the historically different forms in which they produce and reproduce their social existence. This is Marx's advance over metaphysical humanism. As Althusser points out, Marx's claim (in his sixth thesis on Feuerbach) that the human essence is not an abstraction inherent in the individual but a historically variable ensemble of social relations is not a definition but a dereification of the concept of the human.¹⁷ But Althusser's allergy to the Hegelian aspects of Marx's analysis of the commodity form blinds him to its significance as the mediating link between culture and nature. What is crucial is the twofold nature of the labor involved in commodity production: it is at once abstract and concrete. Both the exchange value of abstract labor and the use value of concrete labor are encompassed by the commodity form (since the dimension of use value does not exist independently of exchange value). Labor is exchanged abstractly but used concretely. Because abstract, value-producing labor is inseparable from concrete, use-producing labor, the commodity form mediates social reproduction while remaining utterly opaque to its practitioners. The commodification of production and exchange blinds producers and exchangers to the social relations (and more fundamentally, to the class relation) embedded in their acts of producing and exchanging. This socially necessary un-consciousness is entwined with the un-consciousness of the drive. The un-human core of the human, or what is at once more and less than human,

17 "Between these two terms (man/ensemble of the social relations) there is, doubtless, some relation, but it is not legible in the definition, it is not a relation of definition, not a relation of knowledge." Louis Althusser, "A Complementary Note on Real Humanism," in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2005), 243.

comprises both the compulsion of the drives and the compulsion exerted by the social forms necessarily occluded from experience. Thus the un-human is not only what compels us to repeat ourselves; it is also what drives us to reproduce ourselves without knowing that what we are doing makes us what we are. To recognize this is to recognize human history as a process that does not unfold linearly from an identifiable origin to foreseeable end. Human history unfolds catastrophically, in a ceaselessly reiterated overturning of origin and end driven by the twin pulses of libidinal repetition and social reproduction. This is the insistence of the un-human at the core of the human. It is the insistence of this un-human negativity that un-determines the metaphysical and anthropological determinations of the human.

NEGATIVE UNIVERSALITY

Thus the human is neither a metaphysical subject nor an anthropological attribute. It is the cipher for an “undetermined determinability” that cannot be rooted in the metaphysical difference between actuality and potentiality. Simon Skempton defines this as “a negative and contentless universality; the overcoming of all specific determinacy; thus it is not the universalization of any determination.”¹⁸ It is precisely the negative universality of being-human that is estranged in money and exchange value. Thus Marx writes: “the inversion and confusion of all human and natural qualities, the fraternization of impossibilities, this divine power of money lies in its being the externalized and self-externalizing genus-being of man. It is the externalized capacities of humanity.”¹⁹ Skempton glosses this as

18 Simon Skempton, *Alienation after Derrida* (London: Continuum, 2010), 200.

19 Karl Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 118.

follows: “this alienation involves universal determinability taking the form of the ‘spectrality’ of money and exchange value. For Marx, humanity’s ‘generic being’ is an insubstantial unessential universality, not tied to specificity, which is the basis of its social relationality, but which is alienated from the individual through capitalist social relations and the division of labor, which in turn tie her to specific determinacy.”²⁰ The question is whether this universal determinability has become estranged, or whether it is (retroactively) generated through this estrangement. If humanity’s generic being is “insubstantial, unessential universality” then the alienation at issue cannot be that of the generic determinable’s estrangement in its specific determination (as when theologians describe human power and wisdom as limited manifestations of God’s limitless power and wisdom). For in this case, the determinable’s undeterminedness would be a subtraction from the determination of its species, and its negativity would follow from the negation of determination, not the negation of negation. In other words, its negativity would remain positively haloed by specific determinacy: it would be a relative rather than a self-relating negativity. But to endow humanity with a generic transformative potential that has become estranged in the course of actual history would be to construe this determinability as a distinct moment that preexists its self-estrangement. This would be to resubstantialize the human essence as an originary state prior to the process of social reproduction and to construe negative universality as the defining property of the human. As I have shown, this is precisely Heidegger’s characterization of existence as *seinkönnen* or pure-potentiality-to-be.

But the materialist twist consists in the claim that the negativity of this universality is not proper to the human because self-estranging

20 Skempton, *Alienation after Derrida*, 126.

negativity manifests the impropriety (or accidentality) of the un-human, upon which the determinability proper to the human depends. This is to say that the undetermined determinability ascribed to being human does not preexist its estrangement in the social forms of money and exchange; it becomes possible through them. The determinable is un-determined through its estrangement. Thus, the determinate does not precede its determination through negation and estrangement; it only acquires determinacy as the result of an estrangement that has always already taken place. This is the subversive core of Hegel's logic of estrangement: "the estrangement has already taken place, the distinction has been excluded from what is selfsame and set to one side; what was supposed to be selfsameness is thus already one of the estranged moments much more than it would ever be the absolute essence itself. That what is selfsame estranges itself means that it, as what is already estranged, as otherness, likewise thereby sublates itself."²¹ Because what is supposed to be selfsame is already one of the estranged moments, any potentiality harbored by it must be subsequent and not antecedent to its estrangement. Potentiality is determined *ex post*, not *ex ante*. What is materialist in Marx is the suggestion that the negative universality of human sociality becomes actual as a real (rather than merely ideal) possibility in and through the social forms that seem to negate it. Communism does not release social activity in order to recover an estranged essence—a transcendent potentiality reified in exchange value and subordinated to capital's self-valorization. Rather, communism perceives in the autotelic finality of money the estrangement of an estranging activity (social reproduction): abstract labor is the appearance of an essence, human sociality, whose actuality it contradicts; yet this contradictoriness, and the political practice consequent upon it,

²¹ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Terry Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 98–99, sec. 162; translation modified.

provides the ground for refounding the actuality of sociality. What we see in abstract labor is the potentiality of our reproductive activity given tangible form in its sheer determinability. Abstract labor is a form assumed by reproductive activity, but it is not until it appears *as* estranged in the illusory autonomy of commodified labor power that this activity, and the possibilities generated by our perceiving its estranged form, become appropriable as our own.

THE COMPULSION OF THE HUMAN

Human history is generated by (social) reproduction and (libidinal) repetition. But it is also the differential element within which reproduction and repetition recur. As such, history is not the linear accretion of determination but a recurring loop through which reproduction and repetition jointly un-determine whatever has become actually determinable. This is why the human is not only mutable but the source of a mutability that is *sui generis*. But where idealism rooted this mutability in self-consciousness, Marx and Freud tie it to the compulsions of reproduction and repetition, both of which operate “behind the back of” self-consciousness. The “tremendous power of the negative” that Hegel attributed to “the pure I” is rooted in a “thing” that is not any recognizably human subject or self, precisely because it is neither a monad nor a dyad: it is the un-human offspring of repetition and reproduction.²² But it is precisely the error of idealism to view what is necessarily un-conscious, understood as that which is structurally incommensurable with conscious experience, as extrinsic or foreign to conceptual self-consciousness. Only by grasping its structural heteronomy, which is to say, the constitutive role

22. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 20, sec. 32.

played by the un-conscious within it, can self-consciousness, or what Hegel called reason, comprehend itself and thereby satisfy its own conceptual compulsion.²³ In other words, only by recognizing un-human compulsion can humans be compelled to become free.

²³ I owe the concept of “structural heteronomy” to Tuomo Tiisala, who uses it in a distinct but related sense.

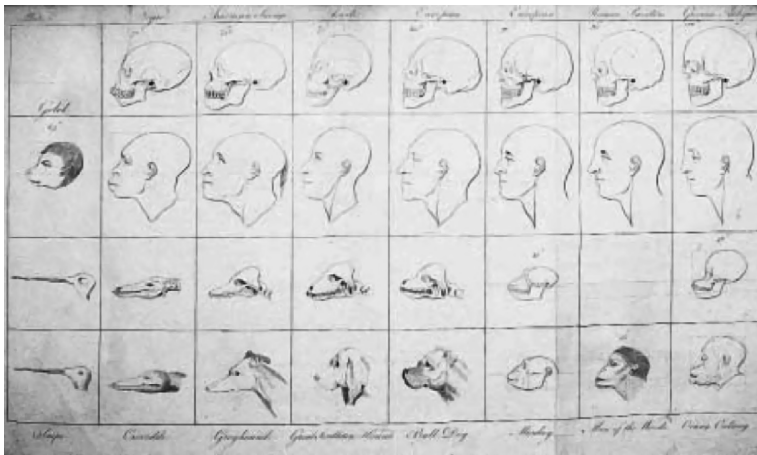


FIGURE 15 A racist illustration from Charles White, *An Account of the Regular Gradation in Man and in Different Animals and Vegetables; and from the Former to the Latter* (1799)

CHAPTER 11

Being Human, Being *Homo Sapiens*

Denis Walsh

Why had this view that the person is the organism, and not something else on top, eluded me for so long?¹

Elysium chlorotica is a tiny, bright green marine nudibranch (sea slug) with an extraordinary way of life. The transparent larvae settle upon strands of the green alga *Vaucheria littorea*, feed, and metamorphose. The juveniles incorporate the photosynthetic chloroplasts into the cells of the gut. They further co-opt the algal genes that regulate photosynthesis. Having taken the photosynthetic apparatus of the algae on board, they turn green and proceed to fix the energy they need exclusively through photosynthesis. Henceforth, they live “like plants,” no longer needing to ingest food to survive. They even adopt a leaf-like shape and orient themselves toward the incoming light to maximize

¹ Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.

energy intake, much as a vascular plant leaf does.² This is a bizarre and extravagant way for an animal to live.

The biologist, mathematician, and Aristotle scholar D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson reminds us that "everything is the way it is because it got that way."³ Kinds of living things, like *E. chlorotica*, get the way they are through the process of evolution. It is to be expected, then, that the theory of evolution should provide an account of the distinctive way of being—the "nature"—of *E. chlorotica*. Pretheoretic intuition, at least, suggests that the account of *Elysium* nature that evolution underwrites is a substantive one: robust, essentialist, and normative. It explains why members of *E. chlorotica* share the features they do, and what differentiates them from members of other species. It allows us to discern the functions of an individual sea slug's various structures and activities, by understanding how they contribute to *E. chlorotica* well-being. It gives us a sense of what *E. chlorotica* flourishing, and failing to do so, consist in. It suggests that there are activities that an individual sea slug ought to engage in and specific circumstances it ought to avoid.

Human beings constitute a kind of organism too. The category *human*, like *E. chlorotica*, is a taxonomic one; to be human is to be a member of *Homo sapiens sapiens*. Being human is marked out by a complex and distinctive way of life, distinguished by a range of highly sophisticated capacities as (inter alia) social, cognitive, conative, moral, and aesthetic agents. Just as *E. chlorotica* nature is an evolved phenomenon, it is tempting to think that human nature is too. Whatever it might be, human nature is intimately related to the fact that we are *Homo sapiens*, and *Homo sapiens* is a product of evolution.

2 I thank Sonia Sultan for the example. See her *Organism and Environment: Ecological Development, Niche Construction, and Adaptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

3 R. C. Lewontin and R. Levins, *Biology under the Influence: Dialectical Essays in Ecology, Agriculture and Medicine* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2007).

This intuition has broad appeal; it has inspired no shortage of attempts to ground the understanding of human way of life in our evolutionary history as a species, beginning with Darwin himself.⁴ In drawing human nature under the ambit of the natural sciences, the Darwinizing project has been credited with instigating a revolution as profound as that initiated by Copernicus.⁵ Some of the more ardent proponents of Darwin-inspired accounts of human nature often even contend that they eclipse all prior, nonevolutionary approaches: “all attempts to answer the question before 1859 are worthless, and we are better off if we ignore them completely.”⁶

Yet the project of grounding human nature in evolutionary biology has encountered significant opposition, not just from traditional practitioners of the “moral sciences,” who might understandably be chary about ceding disciplinary territory to the natural sciences, but also from the mainstream of evolutionary biologists and philosophers of biology.⁷ Evolutionary theory, it is said, lacks the resources to deliver a substantive conception of our nature as creatures guided by moral, cognitive, social, political, and aesthetic norms. The resistance set in at the inception of the Darwinizing project itself. The codiscoverer (with Darwin) of the process of natural selection, Alfred Russell Wallace, voiced his own misgivings: “we are endowed with intellectual and moral powers superfluous to evolutionary requirements.”⁸

The evident failure of evolutionary biology to provide a satisfactory account of human nature suggests either of two morals. Some commentators argue that the failure casts doubt on the existence of any natural

4 Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (London: Charles Murray, 1871).

5 Friedel Weinert, *Copernicus, Darwin, Freud* (Chicago: Wiley, 2009).

6 G. G. Simpson, “On the Biological Nature of Man,” *Science* 152 (1966): 472–78, 472.

7 Philip Kitcher, *Vaulting Ambition* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), and “Four Ways of Biologizing Ethics,” reprinted in *Conceptual Issues in Evolutionary Biology*, ed. E. Sober, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2006), 575–86.

8 A. R. Wallace, *Natural Selection and Tropical Nature: Essays on Descriptive and Theoretical Biology* (London: McMillan, 1889).

phenomenon of “human nature” worthy of the name.⁹ Evolutionary theory, critics claim, has no place for our pretheoretic concept of an organismal nature; a fortiori, the concept of a *human* nature, construed as an instance or extension, is superfluous and vacuous. Others suggest that, while there clearly *is* such a phenomenon as human nature, the failure of the evolutionary reduction serves to underscore the irrelevance of human evolution to our understanding of it.¹⁰ I would like to explore a third alternative. I agree that the Darwinizing project fails. It does not follow, however, that a comprehensive, robust, normative conception of human nature is wholly refractory to an evolutionary treatment. The fault lies not so much in the theory of evolution per se as in the interpretation of it that the Darwinizing project presupposes. Properly understood, I argue, evolutionary theory requires a concept quite like that of an organismal nature if it is to meet its most basic explanatory objectives. Human nature is an instance of this generalized organismal nature: it is the organismal nature held in common by members of *Homo sapiens*. Human nature qualifies as a natural phenomenon not because it can be given a reductive explanation in terms of other evolutionary concepts but because the concept *human nature* earns its keep in (what ought to be) our best scientific account of human evolution.

I proceed as follows. I begin with a short, necessarily cursory, survey of two extensive bodies of literature, one in evolutionary ethics and one in evolutionary psychology. Its objective is simply to outline the general structure—and the futility—of the orthodox program to provide

9 Michael Ghiselin, *Metaphysics and the Origin of Species* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997). These doubts are commonly raised: Richard Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006); William Joseph Fitzpatrick, *Teleology and the Norms of Nature* (Milton Park, Abingdon: Taylor and Francis, 2000); Sharon Street, “A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value,” *Philosophical Studies* 127 (2005): 109–66; Tim Lewens, “Human Nature, the Very Idea,” *Philosophy and Technology* 25 (2012): 459–74; Jay Odenbaugh, “Nothing in Ethics Makes Sense Except in the Light of Evolution? Natural Goodness, Normativity and Naturalism,” *Synthese* 194 (2017): 1031–55.

10 Roger Scruton, *On Human Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

a reductive account of human nature in terms of evolution. The failure of this program gives rise to an alternative approach to naturalizing human nature, neo-Aristotelianism. Neo-Aristotelianism posits as primitive a robust, normative conception of human nature. This conception has resonances with Aristotle's notion of *bios*, or organismal way of life, that Lennox argues is an integral part of Aristotle's comprehensive theory of organismal structure, function, and diversity.¹¹ Further, I argue, something strongly reminiscent of *bios* is required by contemporary evolutionary theory if it is to meet its principal objective of explaining biological fit and diversity. A robust, essentialistic, normative conception of organismal nature—and by extension human nature—of just the sort suggested by neo-Aristotelianism really ought to be part of our best evolutionary explanation of organismal fit and diversity.

THE DARWINIAN REDUCTION

The project of providing an evolutionary account of human nature has traditionally been pursued along two more or less discrete lines of enquiry: the evolution of human ethical conduct and the evolution of human cognition. Either way, the objective is to explain the putative features of human nature exclusively in terms of their contribution to fitness (survival and reproduction).

Evolutionary Ethics

One prominent strategy (e.g., Darwin's in *The Descent of Man*) proceeds by locating presumptive rudiments of those features that distinguish human way of life in the behavior of nonhominines. If these can be explained as evolutionary adaptations, then their more sophisticated

¹¹ See James G. Lennox, "Form, Essence, and Explanation in Aristotle's Biology," in *A Companion to Aristotle*, ed. Georgios Anagnostopoulos (London: Blackwell, 2009), 348–67, and "Bios, Πραξις, and the Unity of Life," in *Was ist Leben?*, ed. S. Föllinger (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 2010), 239–57.

human analogues can be treated as embellishments that serve the same evolutionary functions. The evolution of altruism provides a vivid example. Moral, social, and political imperatives often demand that we act altruistically. Altruistic behavior seems to have precursors, or at least analogues, in nonhuman organisms.¹² Organisms often forego the opportunity to reproduce in favor of other organisms, or endanger themselves by helping others. This is counterintuitive, to say the least. Failing to reproduce, or consistently putting oneself in harm's way, decreases an organism's fitness. We expect such tendencies to be selected out of a population. So altruism poses a paradox to evolutionary theory; it evolves, and yet it seems that it shouldn't.

The paradox of altruism was resolved through a combination of theoretical tools: gene centrism, inclusive fitness, game theory, and group selection. According to gene centrism, evolution by natural selection is the accumulation and accretion of those gene types with greater fitness. The *raison d'être* of an organism is the propagation of copies of its gene types.¹³ One way for an organism to spread copies of its gene types is to reproduce; another is to promote the survival and reproduction of relatives. Siblings, after all, share roughly as many copies of their gene types as parents do with their offspring. Failing to reproduce in deference to others or endangering yourself in order to save another is not necessarily the evolutionary dead-end it might appear to be if those advantaged by your actions can spread your gene types by proxy. W. D. Hamilton suggested that we replace Darwinian "classical" fitness, the measure of an organism's capacity to propagate its own genes, with "inclusive fitness."¹⁴ An organism's inclusive fitness is a function of its capacity to pass on copies of its own genes and the capacity of its relatives to pass on theirs (indexed to the degree of relatedness).

12 Including, evidently, bacteria: A. Griffin, S. A. West, and A. Buckling, "Cooperation and Competition in Pathogenic Bacteria," *Nature* 430 (2004): 1024–27.

13 Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

14 W. D. Hamilton, "The Genetical Evolution of Social Behaviour. I," *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 7 (1964), 1–16.

In acting altruistically toward relatives—that is to say, in acting to the detriment of its classical fitness—an organism may advance its inclusive fitness. Altruistic behavior can evolve via a process evolutionary biologists call “kin selection,” in which the strategy of kin helping kin is retained and spread in a population.

Kin selection theory is inadequate both as an account of human ethical conduct and as an account the evolution of altruism. Ethical conduct isn’t nepotism, and neither is altruism; these behaviors involve more than the preferential treatment of kin. Advocates of the Darwinian reduction enlisted game theory and group selection theory to account for the evolution of behaviors that benefited kin and nonkin alike.¹⁵ Game-theoretical models demonstrate that under certain circumstances, the most advantageous long-term strategy for an individual’s gene types may require individuals to surrender fitness to other (even unrelated) individuals. The game-theoretic strategy tit-for-tat, for example, involves cooperating with (i.e., giving up a degree of fitness to) those individuals who are also likely to cooperate, and defecting against (i.e., garnering maximum fitness at the expense of) those likely to defect. Game-theoretical applications demonstrate that, given certain conditions, altruistic interactions—in the form of cooperation—can be both evolutionarily stable and serve to promote the long-term interests of a gene type.

Similarly, group selection theory purports to demonstrate how fitness considerations can explain the evolution of cooperation. The models rely upon the differential assortment of individuals into groups.¹⁶ An altruist interacting with other altruists incurs the cost of altruistic behavior but also reaps the benefit of the altruistic behaviors

¹⁵ See John Maynard Smith, *Evolution and the Theory of Games* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); John Maynard Smith and H. H. Price, “The Logic of Animal Conflict,” *Nature* 246 (1973), 15–18; D. S. Wilson, “A Theory of Group Selection,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of the Sciences, USA* 72 (1975): 143–46.

¹⁶ Elliott Sober and D. S. Wilson, “A Critical Review of Philosophical Work on the Units of Selection,” *Philosophy of Science* (1994) 61: 534–55.

of others. A selfish individual interacting with selfish individuals suffers no fitness decrement on account of its own behavior, nor does it receive any fitness dividend from the actions of others. When groups are constituted in this way, the net fitness benefit to the altruistic trait type in the population as a whole may outweigh the net fitness benefit to the selfish trait type. Here again, these models demonstrate that by forfeiting its capacity to survive and reproduce, an organism can help promote the fitness of its gene types. Altruistic individuals can be enlisted to work for the evolutionary benefit of selfish gene types.

During the heyday of the Darwinian reduction of ethics (the 1970s to the 1990s), models of evolutionary altruism were routinely taken to offer an account of the origin (and nature) of human ethical conduct. In his treatise *On Human Nature*, the evolutionary biologist E. O. Wilson declared: "morality has no other demonstrative ultimate purpose than to keep human genetic material intact."¹⁷

Yet the attempt to ground ethics in evolutionary theory appears to be fatally flawed. It has two principal defects which, taken together, entail that it cannot adequately account for human ethical conduct without radically mischaracterizing it. First, altruistic behavior is by its nature evolutionarily unstable. The group-theoretic and game-theoretic models demonstrate that altruism will not persist in a population unless there is a mechanism that holds in place the proclivity for individual altruistic behavior against the tendency for altruists to be selected out of the population. Second, considerations of evolutionary success or failure seem to be tangential to considerations of moral agency. Ethical conduct is guided by "the good"; natural selection favors "the fit."¹⁸ Perhaps ironically, biologists and philosophers in the Darwinian reduction tradition often pose the second problem as a solution to the

¹⁷ E. O. Wilson, *On Human Nature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 168.

¹⁸ Richard Joyce, "Human Morality: From an Empirical Puzzle to a Metaethical Puzzle," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Evolutionary Ethics*, ed. M. Ruse and R. Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 101–13.

first. Moral intuitions, or the genuine concern for the well-being of others, the thought goes, provide proximate “motivations” for individuals to act in ways that benefit the long-term fitness of their gene types, at the expense of their own individual fitness.¹⁹

This move strikes many as implausible, at least as an account of the evolution of conduct guided by ethical norms. It suggests that human moral intuitions are subject to a comprehensive and systematic error. If the ultimate “reason” for calibrating one’s actions by considerations of the good is to promote actions that are contrary to one’s own evolutionary interests, then there is no *evolutionary* rationale for moral agents to act in pursuit of the good. Further, if, as the Darwinian reduction appears to hold, ethical rationale *just is* evolutionary rationale, there is no ethical rationale for moral conduct either. At best, moral norms are “heuristics” that promote the stability of small groups: “normative thought has evolved to mediate stable cooperation.”²⁰

We might not stand to be inveigled into moral action so long as “the fit” and “the good” happen to align reasonably well: “we are moral only because for most of us most of the time it was and is in our interests to be moral.”²¹ This would be fortuitous, and surprising to say the least.²² In fact, given what some evolutionary psychologists and sociologists say about the fitness-enhancing function of behaviors like infanticide and “rape” in nonhuman organisms,²³ and other morally repugnant fitness-promoting strategies, it seems more than likely that there should be no such close correspondence.²⁴

19 Sober and Wilson, “A Critical Review.”

20 Kim Sterelny and Ben Fraser, “Evolution and Moral Realism,” *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 68 (2017): 981–1006, 987.

21 Sterelny and Fraser, “Evolution and Moral Realism,” 986.

22 Street, “A Darwinian Dilemma.” The “paradox of altruism” for which the aforementioned models are intended as solutions more or less guarantees that they don’t.

23 See Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, “Evolutionary Social Psychology and Family Homicide,” *Science* 242 (1988): 519–24; Randy Thornhill and Craig T. Palmer, *A Natural History of Rape: Biological Bases of Sexual Coercion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

24 Elijah Millgram, “Life and Action,” *Analysis* 69 (2009): 557–64.

The Darwinian reduction, rather than naturalizing ethics, suggests a radical form of ethical antirealism,²⁵ or error theory.²⁶ Many in the Darwinian reduction tradition are willing to embrace these implications.²⁷ “In an important sense, ethics as we understand it is an illusion fobbed off on us by our genes to get us to cooperate. It is without external grounding. . . . Ethics is illusory inasmuch as it persuades us that it has an objective reference. This is the crux of the biological position. Once it is grasped, everything falls into place.”²⁸ To critics of the Darwinian reduction, this is tantamount to forgetting what it is one was trying to naturalize in the first place. Human nature, whatever it might be, should hardly be so demoralizing.

Evolutionary Psychology

If evolutionary ethics is routinely derided as bad moral philosophy,²⁹ another prominent attempt to derive a robust theory of human nature from evolution is roundly dismissed as bad biology. Evolutionary psychology is dedicated to the proposition that evolutionary theory can deliver a “concept of a universal human nature, based on a species-typical collection of complex psychological adaptations.”³⁰ The motivating thought is that human nature is itself an evolutionary endowment, encoded in our genes. “All the potential for thinking, learning, and feeling that distinguishes humans from other animals lies in the information contained in the DNA of the fertilized ovum.”³¹

25 Street, “A Darwinian Dilemma.”

26 Joyce, *Evolution of Morality*.

27 E.g., Michael Ruse, “Darwinian Evolutionary Ethics,” in Ruse and Richards, *The Cambridge Handbook of Evolutionary Ethics*, 89–100.

28 Michael Ruse and E. O. Wilson, *Taking Darwin Seriously: A Naturalistic Approach to Philosophy* (London: Blackwell, 1986).

29 Kitcher, “Four Ways.”

30 John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, “On the Universality of Human Nature and the Uniqueness of the Individual: The Role of Genetics and Adaptation,” *Journal of Personality* 58 (1990): 17–67, 17.

31 Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (New York: Viking, 2002), 45.

At the core of evolutionary psychology is a commitment to adaptationism, the idea that, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, the best explanation of the prevalence of a trait is that it has been promoted by natural selection in the past for its capacity to contribute to organisms' fitness in ancestral environments.³² For adaptationists, the mill of evolution grinds slowly and fine. Natural selection is capable of producing traits that are precisely suited to solving the most exacting problems posed by the environment, but only if it is let to run for extended periods of time. Roughly 90 percent of human history has been played out in the Pleistocene—the so-called 'Environment of Evolutionary Adaptedness' (EEA). The Pleistocene lasted from two million to 12,000 years BCE. There has been too little time since the end of the Pleistocene for evolution to conjure up adaptations to the more recently minted features of our contemporary conditions of existence. The legacy of the environment of evolutionary adaptedness is said to be evident in our cognitive and social faculties: "our modern skulls house a stone-age mind."³³

Perhaps as a consequence of its uncritical adherence to adaptationism, evolutionary psychology portrays human nature as an anachronism—brittle, rigid, and atavistic—exquisitely and inflexibly adapted to a world that expired with our Pleistocene ancestors. To take a salient example, the entrenchment of gender roles is cast as an inevitable holdover from our hunter-gatherer past. "Men devote more effort to status striving than women do, for example, which is almost certainly a product of adaptations that evolved over deep time as a result of recurrent male intrasexual struggles."³⁴ Feminist critics

32 Stephen Downes, "Evolutionary Psychology: Adaptation and Design," in *Handbook of Evolutionary Thinking in the Sciences*, ed. T. Heams, P. Huneman, G. Lecointre, and M. Silberstein (Dordrecht: Springer, 2017), 659–74.

33 Leda Cosmides and John Tooby, "Evolutionary Psychology: A Primer," Center for Evolutionary Psychology, 2005, <https://www.cep.ucs.edu/primer.html>.

34 David M. Buss, "The Great Struggles of Life: Darwin and the Emergence of Evolutionary Psychology," *American Psychologist* 64 (2009): 140–48, 143.

of evolutionary psychology argue that these claims are warranted neither by the observation of human sexual behavior nor by evolutionary theory.³⁵ They largely consist in examples of nonhuman behavior tendentiously chosen because they comport with (usually male biased) preconceptions about human gender roles.³⁶ In doing so, these claims entrench and legitimize current stereotypes and biases.³⁷ To its detractors, evolutionary psychology's conception of human nature further smacks of "biofatalism."³⁸ It imposes strict limits on the kinds of changes, desirable though they may be, that we can make to our institutions, attitudes, and behaviors.

Biologists and philosophers of biology have objected that evolutionary psychology's commitment to adaptationism misrepresents the process of evolution.³⁹ It vastly underestimates the rate of evolutionary change, the flexibility of human evolutionary responses to changing conditions, and the contribution of human conduct to the creation of those conditions. Our ability to alter our environments, share technologies, exchange information, inculcate norms, and promulgate practices through social learning and cultural exchange, our cognitive and behavioral plasticity, our capacity to apprehend and be motivated by rational and ethical demands, all conspire to alter the trajectory, and accelerate the rate, of human evolution. Human evolution may be

35 Carla Fehr, "Feminist Engagement with Evolutionary Psychology," *Hypatia* 27 (2012): 50–72.

36 S. Connell, "Feminism and Evolutionary Psychology," 4th European Feminist Research Conference, Bologna, 2000, <https://www.phil.cam.ac.uk/people/teaching-research-pages/connell>.

37 Lynn Hankinson Nelson, "Evolutionary Psychology, Feminist Critiques Thereof, and the Naturalistic Fallacy," in Ruse and Richards, *The Cambridge Handbook of Evolutionary Ethics*, 227–52.

38 Gillian Barker, *Beyond Biofatalism: Human Nature for an Evolving World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

39 David J. Buller, *Adapting Minds: Evolutionary Psychology and the Persistent Quest for Human Nature* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005); John Dupré, "Against Maladaptationism: Or What's Wrong with Evolutionary Psychology?" in *Knowledge as Social Order: Rethinking the Sociology of Barry Barnes*, ed. M. Mazotti (London: Routledge, 2012), 165–80. As I will show, a large part of the problem stems from seeing the conditions in which humans evolved, the so-called environment of evolutionary adaptedness, as external to, and autonomous with respect to, the way of life of the human species.

rapid, flexible, and strongly responsive to the myriad ways in which human social, political, technological, and moral endeavors construct the conditions under which humans live. Human nature, whatever it might be, is not a fetter that binds us to our deep evolutionary past.

Denatured Nature

In light of the deficiencies of the Darwinian reduction, there is a consensus among philosophers of biology that any attempt to ground a robust, substantive, normative conception of human nature in evolutionary biology is bootless.⁴⁰ The most significant contribution to be made by the theory of evolution is to expose the idea of human nature as an outmoded fancy.⁴¹ “What does evolution teach us about human nature? It teaches us that human nature is a superstition.”⁴² An understanding of evolution should lead us to abandon the search for a human nature: “the idea of a universal human nature is deeply antithetical to a truly evolutionary view of our species.”⁴³ The term is “more trouble than it is worth, and should be abandoned.”⁴⁴

At best, the consensus holds, the only concept of human nature that can be recovered from evolutionary theory is an etiolated, statistical one.⁴⁵ To be sure, evolution can explain some generalizations about human structure and function: humans typically have cognition, emotions, aesthetic appreciation, and moral sentiments, as well as (and equivalently) high cephalic indexes, bipedal gait, precision grip, earlobes, but no baculum. If that is human nature, then it comprises

40 John Dupré, *Human Nature and the Limits of Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Tim Lewens, *Cultural Evolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

41 Lewens, “Human Nature.”

42 Ghiselin, *Metaphysics*, 1.

43 Buller, *Adapting Minds*, 419.

44 Kevin N. Laland and G. R. Brown, “The Social Construction of Human Nature,” in *Why We Disagree about Human Nature*, ed. E. Hannon and T. Lewens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 127–44, 127.

45 Tim Lewens, “Foot Note,” *Analysis* 70 (2010): 468–73; Grant Ramsey, “Human Nature in a Post-essentialist World,” *Philosophy of Science* 80 (2013): 983–93.

nothing more than a loose amalgam of widespread evolved human traits.⁴⁶ “If by ‘human nature’ all one means is a trait which happens to be prevalent and important for the moment, then human nature surely exists.”⁴⁷ According to John Dupré, “there is no more to human nature . . . than the developmental cycles that currently constitute human life.”⁴⁸

The deflationary concept of human nature served up by evolutionary considerations cannot bear the explanatory burden of the pretheoretic notion. It doesn’t support any version of essentialism,⁴⁹ or any strongly evaluative judgments about what constitutes the pursuit of a good life or defects of character or conduct: “it is, strictly speaking, descriptive and non-normative.”⁵⁰ It may underwrite certain of our inductive practices, but beyond that we should be “rightly troubled when human nature [is] put to work in ethical and political debate.”⁵¹ Insofar as there is a defensible account of human nature to be had, it is “bland and uninformative.”⁵²

The fact that the best concept of human nature the Darwinian reduction can deliver is pallid and feeble suggests to some that the robust, substantive pretheoretic notion is defective.⁵³ To others it suggests that evolutionary considerations are irrelevant to our understanding of human nature. Human nature “must be understood through another order of explanation than that offered by genetics and that we belong

46 Edouard Machery, “A Plea for Human Nature,” *Philosophical Psychology* 21 (2008): 321–29, and “Doubling Down on the Nomological Notion of Human Nature,” in Hannon and Lewens, *Why We Disagree about Human Nature*, 18–39.

47 David L. Hull, “On Human Nature,” *PSA: Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association* (1986), 3–13, 9.

48 Dupré, *Human Nature*, 95.

49 Lewens, *Cultural Evolution*.

50 Ramsey, “Human Nature,” 992.

51 Lewens, “Human Nature,” 473. The minimalist consensus on evolution-based conceptions of human nature is nicely surveyed in Hannon and Lewens, *Why We Disagree about Human Nature*.

52 Kim Sterelny, “Sceptical Reflections on Human Nature,” in Hannon and Lewens, *Why We Disagree about Human Nature*, 108–26, 120.

53 Lewens, “Human Nature”; Laland and Brown, “Social Construction.”

to a kind that is not defined by the biological organization of its members.”⁵⁴ Human nature, whatever it is, should hardly be so trivial.

NEO-ARISTOTELIANISM

If the Darwinian reduction cannot render a satisfactory account of human nature, perhaps an alternative approach to understanding humans as organisms can. Neo-Aristotelian naturalism is an attempt to ground an account of moral agency in a robust biological conception of human nature.⁵⁵ The leading idea is that human nature is an instance of a more general kind of natural phenomenon: organismal nature. An organism's nature is fundamental to its being the kind of living thing it is. The shared natures of organisms of a kind are manifest in their species-characteristic natural history. Michael Thompson offers the generalization that “bobcats breed in spring” as the paradigm of a natural historical judgment.⁵⁶ Such judgments license claims about what flourishing and natural defect consist in for organisms of a given kind. Generally, bobcats that breed in the spring are flourishing, and those that don't are failing.

Human nature is a complex kind of natural history. It comprises, inter alia, the ability to act in accordance with the demands of moral and rational norms. So moral and rational agency are natural faculties of human beings. They contribute to human flourishing in much the way that strong roots contribute to the flourishing of an oak tree,⁵⁷ or photosynthesis contributes to the flourishing of *E. chlorotica*. The natures of oak trees, nudibranchs, and humans are vastly different in their specific details. Nevertheless, each consists in the integrated set of structures,

⁵⁴ Scruton, *Human Nature*, 19.

⁵⁵ Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001); Michael Thompson, *Life and Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

⁵⁶ Thompson, *Life and Action*.

⁵⁷ Foot, *Natural Goodness*.

activities, and purposes that constitute their respective ways of life. “And for all the enormous differences between the life of humans and that of plants or animals, we can see that human defects and excellences are similarly related to what human beings are and what they do.”⁵⁸

Claims about the way moral and rational agency contribute to human flourishing are teleologically basic. Just as the function of the cordate heart is to pump blood because doing so contributes to cordate flourishing (*ceteris paribus*), so too the function of moral and rational faculties is determined by their contribution to the goodness (the flourishing) of a human life. “The concept of a good human life plays the same part in determining goodness of human characteristics and operations that the concept of flourishing plays in the determination of goodness in plants and animals.”⁵⁹ Accordingly, judgments of moral goodness and moral defect share roughly the form as judgments concerning the function of other anatomical, metabolic, or behavioral features of an organism. “the evaluation of human action has the same conceptual structure as the evaluation of operations in the sub-rational living world.”⁶⁰

Anti-naturalism

Critics of neo-Aristotelian naturalism complain that it has signally failed to show that its preferred concept of human nature is natural.⁶¹ The metaphysically laden, robustly normative conception of organismal nature promoted by neo-Aristotelianism appears to find no warrant where we would most likely expect to find it, in the theory of evolution.⁶² Advisedly, neo-Aristotelians make no spurious appeal to

⁵⁸ Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 15.

⁵⁹ Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 33–34.

⁶⁰ Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 49.

⁶¹ Odenbaugh, “Nothing in Ethics.”

⁶² Fitzpatrick, *Teleology*.

evolutionary theory for support.⁶³ Instead these authors claim to be offering a non-evolutionary alternative: “Foot does not hope to displace the evolutionary view of function. Instead, we should read her as aiming at a view of function that is quite different, and plays a separate theoretical role.”⁶⁴ As Micah Lott argues: “The fact that biologists (and philosophers of science) have a different way of approaching biological teleology does not, in itself, show anything illegitimate about the kind of judgment that interests Foot and Thompson.”⁶⁵ That may well be, but if the objective of neo-Aristotelian naturalism is to present human nature as “part of the natural, biological order of living things,”⁶⁶ “by seeing how we humans are a part . . . of the world that the sciences tell us about,”⁶⁷ it can hardly afford to eschew the pronouncements of those sciences. In the absence of any positive account of how these concepts are vouchsafed by scientific practice, the question remains what supports the conviction that attributions of “flourishing,” “defect,” “functioning,” and “human nature” latch onto any genuinely *natural* phenomena, rather than being merely projections onto the natural world, stances, folk customs, superstitions, fictions, or delusions. Tim Lewens explicitly raises the challenge: “The onus is on the likes of Foot and Thompson not merely to show that much discourse seems committed to normative essences, but that there really are such essences. Unless such a task is achieved, they have shown only that people are intuitive Aristotelians, without showing that

63 Michael Thompson's contention is that the concept of organismal nature is presupposed by the study of biology (*Life and Action*). I'm grateful to Parisa Moosavi for many helpful discussions on this issue.

64 John Hacker-Wright, “What Is Natural about Foot's Ethical Naturalism?,” *Ratio* 22 (2009): 308–21, 317.

65 Micah Lott, “Have Elephant Seals Refuted Aristotle? Nature, Function, and Moral Goodness,” *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 9 (2012): 353–75.

66 Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 206.

67 Julia Annas, “Virtue Ethics: What Kind of Naturalism?,” in *Virtue Ethics, Old and New*, ed. S. M. Gardiner (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 11–29, 11.

Aristotelianism is a position we should adopt.”⁶⁸ Lewens’s challenge is an acute one. I’d like to suggest a neo-Aristotelian response. I think that the neo-Aristotelian concept of an organismal nature—and by extension, human nature—is secured by its role in the biological sciences after all, albeit in a way that neither its proponents nor its critics have anticipated.

A concept might earn its naturalistic keep either through a complete reductive explanation in the terms of an accepted body of scientific theory, or by being an indispensable part of that theory.⁶⁹ The failure of the Darwinian reduction suggests that the former strategy will bear no fruit; there is no reductive explanation of organismal nature to be had. But little has been said about the latter—that is, whether natures might be required as parts of the explanatory apparatus of evolutionary biology. At first glance, this too seems unlikely, given the prevalent “antiessentialist” sentiment running through current evolutionary biology and its philosophy.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, I suggest that an indispensable role for organismal natures can be found in the project of explaining the fit and diversity of biological form.

ARISTOTELIAN BIOLOGY

There is a systematic theory of biological fit and diversity that offers neo-Aristotelians a ready-made account of organismal nature. In Aristotle’s biology, organismal nature is an integral component of the science of biological structure, function, behavior, and diversity.⁷¹ For Aristotle, to be an organism is to be a particular kind of interaction

⁶⁸ Lewens, “Foot Note,” 469.

⁶⁹ Compare the ways in which on the one hand pressure and temperature count as natural and on the other hand matter, energy, and spacetime do.

⁷⁰ Dupré, *Human Nature*; Lewens, “Human Nature.”

⁷¹ For more on Aristotle, see Kamtekar, chapter 1 here.

between form and matter.⁷² The form of an organism is soul (*psuche*). “Soul (*Psuche*) is distinguished by a set of vital functions, nutrition, growth, locomotion and (in the case of humans) cognition. We may think of the form of an organism as a set of organizing principles, or a set of goal-directed dispositions, to organize its matter in such a way that the organism is capable of performing particular soul functions (in the particular way) distinctive of its kind.”⁷³ Matter, for its part, is that in which form is realized. It is the actualization of the possibilities for organismal structure, function, and activities that are immanent in an organism’s form.⁷⁴ This “interactive unity” of formal and material natures is the key to understanding Aristotle’s biology.⁷⁵ In particular, we explain why an organism has its traits by citing its form.

Yet Aristotelian form is inadequate, by itself, to explain biological fit and diversity. It does not explain or differentiate the startling variety of organismal ways of being. Nor does it account for the highly specific features that organisms of a kind have in common, or what distinguishes each kind from every other. The reason is that form is a relative concept; any two organisms share a form, and organisms that share a form may differ in systematic ways.⁷⁶ For example, according to Aristotle, both plants and animals have a nutritive soul. But that doesn’t explain their wildly divergent ways of procuring energy; plants photosynthesize, and animals need to eat. Similarly, all animals share a sensory soul that figures in their capacity to move, but that does not account for the differences between the ways that

72 Anna Marmodoro, “Power Mereology: Structural Versus Substantial Powers,” in *Philosophical and Scientific Perspectives on Downward Causation*, ed. M. Paoletti and F. Orilia (London: Routledge, 2017), 110–27.

73 James G. Lennox, “Material and Formal Natures in Aristotle’s *de Partibus Animalium*,” in *Aristotle’s Philosophy of Biology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 182–204, 183. On the Aristotelian material cause, see also Pack, Reflection here.

74 Aryeh Kosman, *The Activity of Being* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

75 The term “interactive unity” is from David Charles, *Aristotle on Meaning and Essence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

76 By “the more and the less.” See James G. Lennox, “Aristotle on Genera, Species, and ‘The More and the Less,’” *Journal of the History of Biology* 13 (1980): 321–46.

E. chlorotica and humans get around. Uniquely, humans have a rational soul, but that doesn't wholly account for difference between the distinctively human way of being and that of other organisms.⁷⁷ Some other theoretical apparatus is required to explain the systematic differences between species (or lineages) and the homogeneity within them.

Aristotle introduces a further technical concept, *bios*.⁷⁸ *Bios* is an ontologically basic, explanatorily fundamental feature of organisms of a specific kind. It consists in "the full complement of an animal's activities organized around the single goal of its specific way of life."⁷⁹ Normally, an organism is endowed with a capacity to build and regulate itself in such a way that equips it to discharge its distinctive way of life. In order to do so, an organism must have structures and must behave in ways that are appropriately suited to its circumstances. In this way, *bios* accounts for the complex match between an organism and its conditions of existence. *Bios* also explains the integration among an organism's various subsystems, the coordinated control of its development, and its robust capacity to adapt to unpredictable, potentially deleterious happenstance. Furthermore, *bios* is what organisms of the same specific kind have in common, in virtue of which they share their kind-typical structures, activities, and relations to one another. *Bios*, for Aristotle, is a theoretical posit, an indispensable feature of what we might call his theory of the organism.

Aristotelian *bios* nicely captures the concept of organismal nature invoked by the neo-Aristotelians. It undergirds an essentialist, strongly normative conception of flourishing for an organism of a particular

77 Human dentition, digestion, locomotion, vision, and manual dexterity, for example, are unique but are probably not explained exclusively by our possession of a rational soul.

78 James G. Lennox, "*Bios*, *Πραξεις*, and the Unity of Life," in *Was ist Leben?*, ed. S. Föllinger (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 2010), 239–57. This is an oversimplification. Aristotle introduce four "differentiae," of which *bios* is the most fundamental (*History of Animals* 1.1 487a 11–12). See Lennox, "*Bios*."

79 Lennox, "Form, Essence," 355.

kind; an organism flourishes when it successfully pursues the particular way of life typical of its kind. *Bios* also supports flourishing's dual concept of natural defect. An organism is defective insofar as it is incapable (under propitious conditions) of discharging its characteristic way of life.⁸⁰ *Bios* further offers a theoretical justification of both the generic and normative features of our "natural historical" judgments. Just as *E. chlorotica* generally has its special structures and activities because they contribute to the successful pursuit of its way of life, we *Homo sapiens* have our distinctive structures, capacities, and activities for the purpose of fulfilling our peculiar way of life. Striving to fulfill such a way of life is essential to being a member of *E. chlorotica* or *H. sapiens*. In this way, *bios* provides for a robust, essentialist, teleologically basic, normative conception of human nature and human flourishing of the sort demanded by neo-Aristotelians.

That the concept *bios* is aptly suited as a ground for the neo-Aristotelian concept of organismal nature is convenient, and hardly surprising. Nevertheless, it does little to advance neo-Aristotelian claims to naturalism. The trouble is that, as we have seen, our current best scientific practice, modern evolutionary biology, appears to have no use for *bios* as an explanatory primitive. Instead, current biology explains way of life by appeal exclusively to the principles of population dynamics. However, there is reason to believe that population dynamics alone cannot adequately account for one of the principal explananda of biology, the adaptive fit of organisms to their conditions of existence.

ADAPTIVE EVOLUTION

Evolutionary theory tells us that populations change in their structure, and as they do they come to comprise individuals generally better

80 Foot, *Natural Goodness*.

suited to their conditions of existence. So there are two evolutionary phenomena to be explained: population change and organismal adaptation. The concept of fitness figures in the explanation of both. Roughly speaking, fitter individuals survive and reproduce at a greater rate, and as a consequence, the traits that dispose them to do so increase in frequency. It turns out, however, that it is no trivial matter to get a generalized theory of evolutionary population change, based on fitness, to explain the phenomenon of adaptive evolution.⁸¹ Variation in fitness may explain how populations change their structure under natural selection, “but as Fisher has also emphasized, the steady increase in the frequency of an allele under selection need not invariably result in ‘the adaptive modification of specific forms.’”⁸² Explaining population dynamics and explaining organismal adaptedness turn out to be two quite different projects.

This is a complex, technical issue, but one simple way to animate it is to point out that the theory of population dynamics tells us something generic about biological populations; they evolve adaptively. Whenever a population *of any kind* varies in fitness, the population will change in predictable and quantifiable ways. Population dynamics identifies a universal property of *populations* of living things.⁸³ Nevertheless, because it applies indiscriminately to all populations, it fails to distinguish the particularities of evolution in one lineage or population from those of another. A generalized theory that says that *all* populations evolve to maximize fitness lacks the resources to explain how each population evolves its particular adaptations. Modern synthesis evolution faces an issue it is tempting to call the Anna Karenina

81 H. A. Orr and Jerry Coyne, “The Genetics of Adaptation: a Reassessment,” *American Naturalist* 140 (1992): 725–42.

82 H.A. Orr, “The Genetic Theory of Adaptation: A Brief History,” *Nature Reviews, Genetics* 6 (2005): 119–27, 119.

83 D. M. Walsh, André Ariew, and Mohan Matthen, “Four Pillars of Statisticalism,” *Philosophy, Theory and Practice in Biology* 7 (2017): 1–18.

problem: adaptive populations are all alike; every adapted population is adapted in its own way.⁸⁴

Solving the Anna Karenina problem requires adding an explanatory resource to the theory of general population dynamics in order to explain what distinguishes organisms of the same species or lineage and what differentiates one species or lineage from another. Modern synthesis population thinking needs a differentia, just as Aristotle's theory of formal and material natures does. In orthodox Modern synthesis thinking, the role of differentia is played by the external environment. Adaptations are taken to be traits that have been retained in a population, and honed, because of their contribution to meeting the demands posed by the organism's external environment. The adaptations that characterize organisms of a kind and that differentiate each kind from every other kind are the consequence of wholly generic evolutionary principles operating within a population of organisms *interacting with their unique environment*.⁸⁵ For the environment to play the role of adaptive shaper of form, it is usually supposed, it must be wholly external to, and autonomous with respect to, biological form. "To make the metaphor of adaptation work, environments or ecological niches must exist before the organisms that fill them. Otherwise environments couldn't cause organisms to fill those niches."⁸⁶ The environment of evolutionary adaptedness hypothesis in evolutionary psychology is a vivid example of this use of the external, autonomous environment in the account of adaptation.

But here the conventional theory of adaptation encounters a problem, indeed one that is presaged by the standard objection to evolutionary psychology. The environment could not *both* be wholly

84 With apologies to Tolstoy.

85 Peter Godfrey-Smith, "Organism, Environment, and Dialectics," in *Thinking about Evolution*, ed. R. Singh, C. Krimbas, D. Paul, and J. Beatty, 253–66 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

86 R. C. Lewontin, *The Triple Helix: Genes, Organisms and Environments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 63.

autonomous with respect to organisms *and* play the role of differentia. The reason is that organisms structure and mediate the influences of their environments in all manner of ways that are relevant to their evolution.⁸⁷

An elegant example is provided by oligochaete earthworms.⁸⁸ Earthworms are strictly terrestrial organisms, yet surprisingly they have retained the excretory systems of their aquatic ancestors. Aquatic and terrestrial excretory systems function very differently because they face different demands. The most acute challenge faced by an aquatic excretory system is osmotic pressure from the environment, i.e., keeping water out. Such systems must be capable of excreting highly dilute wastes in large volumes. Terrestrial secretory systems face the opposite problem. They must resist desiccation, retaining water against a steep (opposite) osmotic gradient, by secreting highly concentrated wastes. The earthworm's "aquatic" excretory system shouldn't work in its terrestrial environment. However, the characteristic structure of earthworms, and their distinctive life activities—deposit feeding, secretion of mucus, burrowing through, grinding, and compacting the soil—alter the substrate's water retention profile in the worm's immediate vicinity. Soil rendered by earthworm activities is capable of retaining free water in the tiny interstices between its grains. At the scale of individual earthworms, each worm creates for itself a *de facto* aquatic microenvironment within its terrestrial surroundings. Unless one understands the way an earthworm alters and maintains its environment through its life activities, one cannot understand how its aberrant "aquatic"

87 F. John Odling-Smee, Kevin Laland, and Marcus Feldman, *Niche Construction: The Neglected Process in Evolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Kevin Laland et al., "The Extended Evolutionary Synthesis: Its Structure, Assumptions, and Predictions" *Proceedings of the Royal Society. B* 270 (2015): 1433–40.

88 J. Scott Turner, *The Extended Organism: The Physiology of Animal-Built Structures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

excretory system might be adapted to its terrestrial conditions of existence.⁸⁹ In this case, to the extent that the environment determines that the oligochaete excretory system is suitably adapted, that environment is not autonomous with respect to the organisms' activities.

Even in cases where the environment is unchanged by an organism's structure or its activities, the environment still underdetermines what counts as an adaptation. Water, for example, poses a problem to any organism that needs to move through it. Porpoises and paramecia have both evolved solutions but in radically different ways. Harbor porpoises are large, roughly two meters in length. They experience water much the way we do. For porpoises, water flows easily, and they are admirably suited to movement through a "thin" medium. Their terete bodies create smooth laminar flow, offering as little resistance as possible. They displace water by means of a powerful fluke and caudal peduncle. Paramecia are small, roughly 200 microns long. At these scales water is difficult to displace. A paramecium experiences immersion in water in much the way we would experience being immersed in corn syrup.⁹⁰ Given the thickness of the water and the paramecium's lack of musculature, a powerful fluke and caudal peduncle arrangement is not an option. Instead, paramecia have evolved an elaborate system of helically arranged cilia covering their entire integument. The cilia beat in coordinated waves and burrow the paramecium through its medium. Though the physical properties of the environment are the same for porpoises and paramecia, the solutions to the problem it poses are radically different. The difference is due to what each contributes to the *experience* of its environment. What counts as an adaptation depends crucially on the structure, capacities, and activities of the organisms.

89 Laland et al., "Extended Evolutionary Synthesis," 560.

90 E. M. Purcell, "Life at Low Reynolds' Numbers," *American Journal of Physics* 45 (1977): 101–11.

The underdetermination of adaptation by the external environment is ubiquitous. Organisms sharing the same physical setting may make different features salient through their characteristic life activities. The rocks at the base of a tree are a salient part of the environment for the thrush that smashes snail shells on them but not for the woodpecker that forages on the same tree. Conversely, the beetles and grubs underneath the bark are a salient feature of the woodpecker's environment but not that of the thrush.⁹¹ Consequently, these birds have very different suites of adaptations. The difference that explains the difference lies not in the external, autonomous environments—they are the same—but in what the organisms do with them in pursuit of their ways of life.

The upshot is the external autonomous environment cannot solve the Anna Karenina problem. It neither determines what it is to be an adaptation nor explains the adaptedness of individual organisms nor explains what unifies organisms of the same kind and differentiates between organisms of different kinds. The reason is that it is generally impossible to understand how organisms are adapted to their circumstances without taking into account the way organisms themselves alter, maintain, and constitute those circumstances. The differentia required for the evolutionary explanation of adaptation cannot be the external, autonomous environment.

Organismal Natures

An adequate account of adaptation must factor in the organism's experience of and interaction with its circumstances. An organism experiences its conditions, and responds to them, as a set of opportunities for, or impediments to, the pursuit of its way of life. Borrowing a term from J. J. Gibson, we can call these impediments and opportunities "affordances." "The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*, for good or ill. . . . I mean by

91 R. C. Lewontin, "Adaptation," *Scientific American* 293 (1978): 212–28.

it something that refers to both the environment and the animal. . . . It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment.”⁹² To be an affordance is to have a certain salience to an organism. Water affords swimming to a porpoise, walking to a water strider, but neither to a paramecium.

I suggest that the concept we need in order to address the Anna Karenina problem is that of an affordance, more correctly, a system or “landscape” of affordances.⁹³ Affordances are not environments. Whereas environments are wholly external to and autonomous with respect to organisms, affordances are jointly constituted by an organism’s goals and capacities in interaction with the properties of its physical setting. Affordances determine what an organism can and should do, given its goals, abilities, and environment. Conversely, the goals and abilities of an organism partially determine what its conditions of existence afford.

Organisms create and respond to their affordances in myriad ways. In pursuit of its particular way of life, an organism alters and exploits features of its environment, responds adaptively to them, buffers itself against stresses and perturbations both internal and external, makes some features salient and others irrelevant, and innovates. The response to, and creation of, affordances is evident in every facet of an organism’s life. During development, organisms regulate, repair, and reengineer their own genomes.⁹⁴ They exert heritable epigenetic influences over the activities of their genes.⁹⁵ They assimilate and cultivate

92 J. J. Gibson, *The Ecological Theory of Perception* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), 127, emphasis in the original.

93 D. M. Walsh, “The Affordance Landscape: The Spatial Metaphors of Evolution,” in *Entangled Life: Organism and Environment in the Biological Sciences*, ed. G. Barker, E. Desjardins, and T. Pearce (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 213–36.

94 J. A. Shapiro, *Evolution. A View from the 21st Century Perspective* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: FT Press Science, 2011).

95 J. J. Herman, S. Sultan, T. Horgan-Kybelski, and C. Riggs, “Adaptive Transgenerational Plasticity in an Annual Plant: Grandparental and Parental Drought Stress Enhance Performance of Seedlings in Dry Soil,” *Integrative and Comparative Biology* 52 (2016): 77–88.

their microbiota,⁹⁶ build their environments,⁹⁷ teach and acculturate their young. They initiate novel features and functions,⁹⁸ which in turn generate new opportunities and impediments. The complete suite of an organism's anatomy, metabolism, development, behavior, social interactions—in a word, its way of life—contributes to the construction and exploitation of its landscape of affordances.

One cannot understand the dynamics of adaptive evolution, nor can one explain the specific features of an organism's adaptations, unless one understands the way that, in discharging its characteristic life functions, the organism structures the conditions under which it evolves. If adaptive evolution is a response to affordances, and affordances are constituted, created, and moderated by an organism's way of life, then the concept *way of life*, it would appear, should be an indispensable part of the explanation of adaptive evolution. This concept of the unity of structures, activities, environmental interactions, and capacities and goals that makes up an organism's way of life is for all intents and purposes the Aristotelian notion of *bios*. If so, then organismal nature—*bios*—should be an integral part of contemporary evolutionary biology. It is *bios*—*not* the environment—that provides the differentia required in order for the generalized theory of population dynamics to render an account of the fit and diversity of organismal form. *Bios* is further needed to account for the characteristic similarities within, and the dissimilarities between, evolutionary lineages.⁹⁹ Moreover, to ascribe an organism's traits or behaviors as adaptations presupposes a conception of that organism's *bios*.

96 Scott F. Gilbert and David Epel, *Ecological Developmental Biology* (Sunderland, MA: Sinauer, 2009).

97 Odling-Smee et al., *Niche Construction*.

98 M. J. West Eberhard, *Developmental Plasticity and Evolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

99 Lennox anticipates a neo-Aristotelian evolutionary biology that deploys Aristotle's "way of life" as a fundamental explanatory principle: James G. Lennox, "An Aristotelian Philosophy of Biology: Form, Function and Development," *Acta Philosophica* 26 (2017): 33–52.

Human nature, as championed by neo-Aristotelians, consists in the complete integrated suite of distinctive *Homo sapiens* structures, activities, abilities, and goals that distinguish human way of life (*bios*). It is of a piece with the general concept of an organismal nature.¹⁰⁰ That very concept is—or ought to be—an integral part of evolutionary theory.¹⁰¹

The neo-Aristotelians' response to Lewens's challenge, then, should be that their preferred, essentialistic, robustly normative account of human nature is, after all, licensed by its place in best scientific practice, in just the way the challenge demands. It is not reductively explained by evolution; rather it is an indispensable part of the explanatory apparatus of evolutionary biology.

HUMAN NATURE AND HUMAN EVOLUTION

Michael Thompson gives voice to a general class of concerns to the effect that assimilating the concept *human* (that is to say “human nature”) to evolutionary biology runs the risk of blanching it of its normative, moral import.¹⁰² He says of these challenges: “The threat of ‘biologism,’ as we might express their common theme, only holds if the concept *human* . . . is an empirical and biological concept, and only if all substantive knowledge about the human life form is empirical and biological knowledge.”¹⁰³ Instead, he suggests that *human*, like any life form concept has an “*a priori* character.”¹⁰⁴ My discussion here suggests

100 Foot, *Natural Goodness*.

101 For an enlightening discussion, see Parisa Moosavi, “On the Relevance of Evolutionary Biology to Ethical Naturalism,” in *The Ethics of Nature and The Nature of Ethics*, ed. Gary Keogh (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017), 37–50.

102 Michael Thompson, “Apprehending Human Form,” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements* 54 (2004): 47–74. Similar concerns appear to motivate Hacker-Wright, “What Is Natural,” and Lott, “Elephant Seals.”

103 Thompson, “Apprehending Human Form,” 62–63.

104 Thompson, “Apprehending Human Form.”

a third alternative: the concept *human* or *human nature* is neither wholly empirical nor a priori; it is theoretical. It gains its credentials not merely from direct observation, nor exclusively from reflection on “forms of judgment;” it gains its credentials from its foundational place in a body of successful scientific theory.¹⁰⁵ In this respect it is more like the concepts of *matter*, *energy*, or *space-time* than *temperature* or *pressure*.

This should help us to rethink the relation between the study of human nature and the study of human evolution. The traditional Darwinian reduction presupposes, as Thompson suggests, that the concept of human nature must be strictly empirical. It must be an observable consequence of the process of evolution. Those who resist the Darwinian reduction,¹⁰⁶ appear to assume that the concept of human nature must be a priori. It cannot be given to us, revised, or augmented by the study of human evolution. I am advocating a third option: neither reduction nor mutual alienation, but reciprocal illumination.

In order to understand an organism’s way of life, we study its natural history (*sensu* Thompson, *Action and Life*). The study of the natural history of a lineage is in certain ways prior to, and independent of, the study of its evolutionary history. We do not need to invoke evolutionary principles to understand that, in pursuit of their distinctive way of life, members of *E. chlorotica* become secondarily photosynthetic. Nor do we need evolutionary theory to tell us that a member of *E. chlorotica* that fails to co-opt the photosynthetic apparatus of *V. litorea* is failing to flourish. By the same token, we should not suppose that the fact that *E. chlorotica*’s way of life demands that its members

105 Parisa Moosavi, “From Biological Functions to Natural Goodness,” *Philosophers’ Imprint* 19 (2019): 1–20, makes an analogous claim about the concept of function in biology.

106 Scruton, *Human Nature*.

live in this way is irrelevant to their evolutionary history, much less that their evolutionary history is irrelevant to their way of life.

The same considerations apply to the study of human nature. The study of human natural history comprises inter alia the disciplines of moral philosophy, politics, sociology, psychology, aesthetics, and anthropology, not to mention anatomy, physiology, and ethology. The proprietary concepts and the explanatory strategies of these disciplines do not depend on evolutionary theory for their justification. As we have seen, the study of human nature is not reducible to the study of human evolution. There should be no fear, then, that the fact that neo-Aristotelian metaethics and evolutionary biology share a concept of human nature should threaten "to turn ethics into a sub-discipline of biology, and thus to deny what is legitimately called the 'autonomy of ethics.'"¹⁰⁷ Nor is the study of human evolution wholly irrelevant to our understanding of human nature. This is so simply because we got the way we are through evolution. So, an understanding of our evolutionary history (and the workings of evolution in general) should figure in an understanding of why we are the way we are.

In general, there is a reciprocity between organismal nature and organismal evolution. The evolution of a lineage or species is the change in its nature, or way of life, over time in response to the conditions it encounters. The conditions that a lineage encounters, in turn, are largely created by its own way of life. So organismal way of life evolves in response to the conditions created by organismal way of life. This reciprocity holds as much for *Homo sapiens* as for *E. chlorotica*. Human natural history is a consequence of human evolutionary history, which is a response to conditions largely constituted by human natural history. Human nature is thus both an

¹⁰⁷ Thompson, "Apprehending Human Form," 62.

effect and a cause of human evolution. Each, in a sense, creates the other. Consequently, each is required to explain the other. Human evolution is an indispensable part of the study of human nature, in just the way that human nature is an indispensable part of the study of human evolution.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ I began writing this essay in the Jardin Public in Bordeaux and completed it at the Institut d'Études Avancées, Paris. I wish to thank these institutions. I also wish to thank audiences at Musée Nationale d'Histoire Naturelle Paris, Institut d'Études Avancées Paris, and at the Department of History and Philosophy of Science, Cambridge. I am particularly grateful to Parisa Moosavi, Jim Lennox, Paul Bloomfield, and Fermin Fulda for guidance and comments. Karolina Hübner has been uncommonly patient with me throughout the process.

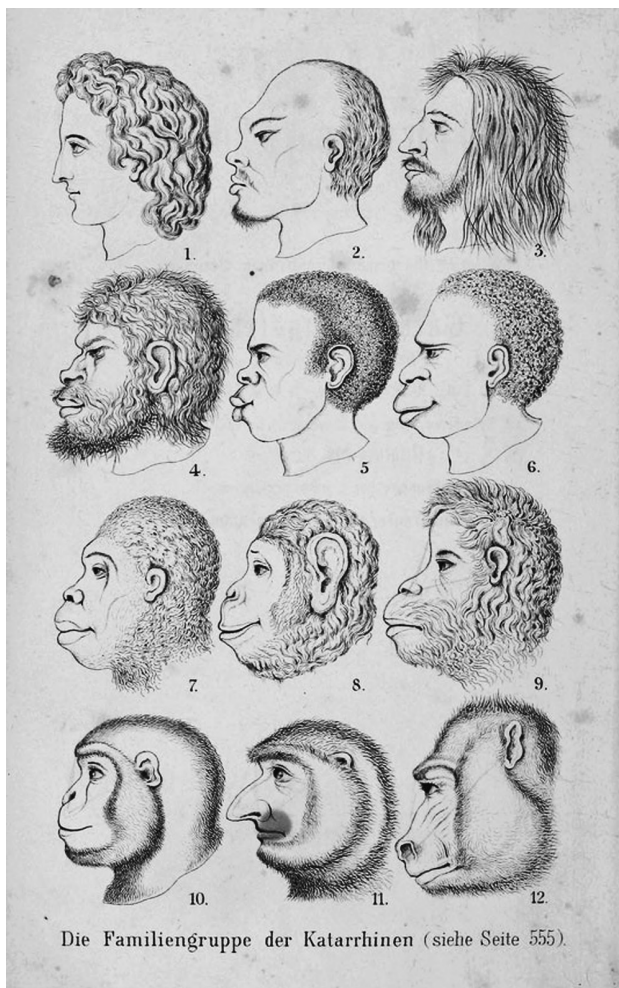


FIGURE 16 The racist frontispiece of Ernst Haeckel's *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte* (1868)

Reflection

THE ANTHROPOMORPHIC 1960S AND
THE HUMAN

Christa Noel Robbins



Anthony Caro's 1962 sculpture *Early One Morning* (fig. 18) is a sprawling assemblage of brightly hued painted steel. Stretching at its extremes up to a lateral extension of twenty feet across the gallery, it requires that the viewer move around it in order to glimpse all of its several angles. That movement is dictated by the formal complexity of the work itself, which holds the viewer's attention as, at each angle, a new view is offered up. At times a distended narrative, stretched across the space in front of the viewer, and at others a compressed pictorial whole, *Early One Morning* pulls the viewer's attention into its compositional rhythms. Focused on its own interior arrangement, clear about its intent, and in control of its relation to the beholder, *Early One Morning* is a self-consciously *modernist* sculpture.

Donald Judd, one of the primary voices defining the minimalist sculptures that were to displace Caro's modernist ones, condemned works such as *Early One Morning* for their "anthropomorphism."¹

1 Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959–1975* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975), 183; originally published in *Arts Yearbook* 8 (1965), 74–78.

The sculpture, Judd argued, evokes a human body in its multiple and relational parts, which move independently, but in coordination with the others: it reaches and reclines, stands upright and gestures. According to Judd, such coordinated movement, which comes from making the sculpture “part by part, by addition,” also evokes the body of its author, the decision-maker placing a part here and then there, composing. *Early One Morning*’s modernist anthropomorphism is, then, double: it is represented in and by the work’s formal organization, as well as being entailed in its identity as an intentional object.

Tony Smith’s *Die* (fig. 19), also from 1962, is the opposite of sprawling. Self-contained, obdurate, and neutral in its oil-finished steel surface, the six-foot-square cube blankly confronts the viewer, offering no surprises from any angle. The viewer can, if so inclined, move around the cube, but will only discover a stubborn lack of variation with each turn. The work makes no such invitation, however; the viewer’s movements are entirely her own. Having eliminated all “part by part” relations, refusing the very idea of compositionality, *Die* refers to neither its maker nor its viewer. Reduced in its form and dependent for any meaning on the contingency of its situation, *Die* is a willfully *minimalist* sculpture.

Michael Fried, an orthodox modernist and the primary voice articulating a critique of minimalism in the 1960s, condemned sculptures such as *Die* for their “latent anthropomorphism.” Scaled to the human body, unitary, like a singular, human whole, and projecting a sense of being hollow, of “having an inner or secret life,” Fried argued that such minimalist (or “literalist,” as he called them) sculptures not only evoke the human form, but confront the viewer with a kind of human presence.² That presence distances the viewer, according to Fried. While Caro’s modernist sculpture

2. Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood” (1967), reprinted in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 150.

absorbs our attention, the literalist work pushes us away, making “the beholder a subject and the piece in question . . . an object.”³ Unlike Judd’s reading of *Early One Morning*, Fried locates *Die*’s anthropomorphism in neither authorial intent nor figurative content. Rather, he finds it in the work’s masquerade as a discrete subject in its own right, mimicking human presence, though failing, at least according to Fried, to obtain a human meaning.

Why, in these two diametrically opposed aesthetic views of 1960s art, is the anthropomorphic such a sticking point? Despite the fact that Fried and Judd describe sculptures that are radically antifigural, they both point to and take issue with a human remnant they find preserved in these abstract forms. This is no simple rejection of the anthropomorphic in art, however. It is rather that the anthropomorphic—how it is treated, whether it is acknowledged, how it is represented—had by the late 1960s become chief among the factors to be considered in making distinctions and value judgments in art. While it is common for art historians today to read this critical focus on the anthropomorphic as standing at the head of an “antihumanist,” postmodern turn, the recourse to the anthropomorphic as a critical descriptor is better viewed as evidence of the struggle over the very definition of the human at this moment in US history. This was, after all, the dawn of the civil rights movement in the United States, when, it hardly needs saying, the presumptions of universal access were being legally, legislatively, and culturally challenged. Not just the valuation of the human but the human content of Americans’ values were undergoing intense scrutiny. The realm of aesthetics was no exception to this. Judd’s and Fried’s focus on the anthropomorphic can be viewed as an unwitting response to this scrutiny and, I would contend, an attempt to secure a uniform concept of the human on more solid

3 Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 154.

ground. While typically characterized as representing divergent camps, Judd and Fried are more productively seen as having a shared commitment to preserving this sense of the human and the clear terms by which that concept is granted and by which it grants value in the world.

Minimalism's preservation of the human comes in the form of the viewer. In his 1966 essay "Notes on Sculpture, Part 2," Robert Morris, like Judd a leading figure in minimalist sculpture, made clear that in reducing sculpture's compositional elements—the "intimacy producing" details, as Morris put it—the viewer's presence is enunciated and required: "one is more aware than before that he himself is establishing relationships, as he apprehends the object from various positions and under varying conditions of light and spatial context."⁴ There is a kind of chiasmatic address to the human in minimalism. On the one hand the human is rejected by turning away from sculpture's figural elements, both in part-by-part compositions and in the reference to a human maker via the work's facture. On the other hand the human is embraced on the other side of the work in the form of the viewer, who is necessarily folded into the signifying means of art production.

Fried's modernist preservation of the human is signaled in a work's comportment, which must give rise to conviction in the work's authenticity or, as Fried put it at the end of his 1967 essay "Art and Objecthood," to the experience of "grace."⁵ To be overly brief about it, Fried rejects minimalism for its address to the viewer. In reducing all internal relation, Fried argued, minimalist sculpture unduly burdens the viewer, requiring their involved activity in order to come into any meaning at all. Fried terms this importunate address "theatricality" and the state of art that invites

⁴ Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture Part 2" (*Artforum* 1966), reprinted in *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 15.

⁵ Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 168.

it “objecthood.” While Fried rejects Judd’s characterization of modernist sculptures as anthropomorphic, he ultimately demands that a human element be discernable in the form of intentionality, a sign, embedded in the work’s composition, that it is, as Fried’s close friend Stanley Cavell put it, “meant.”⁶ Revising Judd’s description of modernist sculpture as gestural (i.e., indexed to the emotive actions of its maker), Fried argued that what is important in such works is “the efficacy of gesture,” which is to say, the manner by which a gesture *communicates* something from one person to another, even if what is communicated is no more than a faith in the ability to communicate. Caro’s sculptures, Fried argued, “are possessed by the knowledge of the human body and how, in innumerable ways and moods, it makes meaning.”⁷

This is all to say that, despite their ostensibly working from oppositional points of view, Judd and Fried (and the art they spoke for) responded to the crisis of confidence in “the sharable intelligibility of human deeds,” as Robert Pippin puts it, with the conviction that human meaning can, nonetheless, be obtained in art.⁸ In Judd’s case it is a conviction that the viewer, in her new-found “freedom” (in Morris’s words), will make meaning by forging novel relations and learning something about how such relationality underwrites meaning as such—a deeply structuralist vision whose influence in the humanities is only now beginning to wane. In Fried’s case, conviction arises as an abiding faith in the ability of *good* works of art to make meaning for everyone—a faith in a community of meaning that is inclusive of everyone—and in his insistence that if the viewer cannot find her way into that community it is the failing of the viewer and never, if any good,

6 See Stanley Cavell, “Music Discomposed” (1965) and “Knowing and Acknowledging” (1966), both reprinted in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

7 Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 162.

8 Robert Pippin, *After the Beautiful: Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 64.

of the art. This model has also proved deeply influential, having been taken up by and expanded on in a number of recent studies, from the literary theorist Walter Benn Michaels's *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History* to Robert Pippin's *After the Beautiful: Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism*.⁹ Both convictions, however, are won by ignoring the cost of entry into the human communities on which they insist, whether defined in structuralist or modernist terms. It was just such convictions that artists from the margins of those communities began to question in the 1960s. Following close on minimalism's heels, artists of all types began to question the presumptive convictions of both modernist and minimalist aesthetics. Returning to the human body with a vengeance, process art, performance art, and all variety of conceptual art threw into doubt any and all claims to knowledge of or faith in the uniform accessibility of meaning in works of art. But such questioning did not wait for the cultural revolution to unfold. It was always present in modernist and minimalist works alike, though the domineering voices of art writers such as Judd and Fried seldom acknowledged it.

Take for example Anne Truitt's 1962 sculpture *Hardcastle* (fig. 20). *Hardcastle* can appear, from a certain angle, to be as self-contained and obdurate as Smith's *Die*. Looming over her at more than eight feet, the sculpture meets the viewer with a dark, hard-edged, and rectangular face. Painted evenly with a matte, acrylic black, the only variation offered in that frontal confrontation comes in the form of an equally pat pedestal: an addition that adds to the sculpture's grave presence and is the first indication that something in *Hardcastle* strays from *Die*'s apodictic structure. For the pedestal, as its name indicates (coming from the French *pede*), provides this upright structure with a foot, a part that relates to

9 Walter Benn Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

another part and, if we're to take Fried and Judd at their words, begins to evoke a body.

A slight move to the left or right reveals this front-facing mass to be a thin panel no more than a few inches thick. Moving around the statue-like form, one encounters two red buttresses reaching up the back and just a few inches shy of the top of the darker panel. In this part-by-part relationality one might also liken Truitt's sculpture to Caro's *Early One Morning*. It absorbs the viewer's attention, drawing it away from the contingencies of its architectural situation. But *Hardcastle* steps out of the composed space of modernist signification, as well, distancing the viewer in a manner that Fried would characterize as "literalist." Indeed, in the 1967 essay "Recentness of Sculpture," which Fried relied on in his definition of literalism, the modernist art critic Clement Greenberg argued that Truitt's sculptures share with other minimalist works a kind of "presence."¹⁰ Truitt's works, Greenberg made clear, alerted him to the effects of presence in contemporary sculpture, in their "dead-pan 'primariness.'"¹¹ This is the same presence that Fried would go on to identify with minimalism's anthropomorphism—a human-like presence that crowds and distances the viewer but offers her nothing in return.

Fried has nothing to say about Truitt, despite his taking Greenberg's description of her 1963 exhibition at the André Emmerich Gallery as a jumping-off point for his own negative reading of minimalist sculpture in "Art and Objecthood." While Fried had a penchant for excluding any female examples from his aesthetic consideration, Truitt's work would also have offered a challenge to Fried in its failure to fit neatly into either a minimalist

¹⁰ Clement Greenberg, "Recentness of Sculpture" (1967), reprinted in *Clement Greenberg, the Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4, *Modernism with a Vengeance*, ed. John O'Brien (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 256.

¹¹ Greenberg, "Recentness of Sculpture," 255.

or a modernist model. This lack of fit was something Greenberg—a committed, if ambivalent advocate of Truitt and one of her close friends—was alive to and attempted to confront in her work, making it clear that her works do not fall easily into either category. I'd like to suggest, by way of conclusion, that Truitt's challenge comes from the particular kind of human relation obtained in her somewhat-minimalist, somewhat-modernist aesthetic. For *Hardcastle* moves away from the abstract, ostensibly universal figure of *the* human and instead evokes the specificity of personhood, a specificity that neither mainstream modernism nor hardcore minimalism was ready or willing to address in the early 1960s.

Truitt's *Hardcastle*, like *Die* and *Early One Morning*, evokes a human subject, but differently. A key to the nature of that evocation is to be found in the title *Hardcastle*. In his book on Truitt, Miguel de Baca reports that the title refers to a memory Truitt had of witnessing a violent car accident as a child—in her recollection a person named “Mr. Hardcastle” died in the accident.¹² This certainly explains the sculpture's somber and funerary form, the overall shape reading as a kind of grave stele. We could even take the reference further and read the red buttresses as streaks of blood or tire tracks or perhaps something like the detailing on a race car. However we read it, this vaguely allusive sculpture is filled with the content of Truitt's memory once we are made aware of it.

Is this to say then that the human presence insinuated into *Hardcastle* is Truitt's own? Yes and no. For Truitt provides no access to this information; knowledge of it comes from our being exposed to the sleuthing of art historians, without which we are shut out of the allusion. The relational composition, the brushed work of the sculpture's surface, its funerary resonances all collaborate to draw

12. Miguel de Baca, *Memory Work: Anne Truitt and Sculpture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 45–49.

us toward possible meanings, only to push us away through both the specificity of its content and the abstractness of its form—“Why *Hardcastle*?” one can’t help but ask. The disconnect between insinuated content and abstract form invites us to seek out not simply *the* human in the work, but the very specific human *subject* it addresses and, at the very least, to acknowledge the difficulty, even the impossibility, of ever bringing that seeking to an end.

Similar operations are encountered in a number of Truitt’s works. The 1961 *First* (which resembles a white picket fence) and the 1962 *Southern Elegy* (the precise scale and shape of a headstone) come immediately to mind, but so do more abstract characteristics: Truitt’s suggestive shapes and wide-ranging colors all insinuate a personal, indeed a *lyrical* kernel into her sculpture’s hard-edged precision. Greenberg was most troubled by this lyrical quality, which he located mainly in Truitt’s unprecedented use of color. Tellingly, Greenberg associated that lyricism with both a “feminine sensibility” and, certainly not unrelated, an unnamable emotional power: “I had to look again and again . . . to discover the power of these ‘boxes’ to move and affect,” Greenberg writes in “Recentness in Sculpture.”¹³ Which is to say, Greenberg couldn’t quite reconcile Truitt’s intimation of gender or her lyrical historical references with either a minimalist or a modernist sensibility.

Having translated Germain Brée’s *Marcel Proust and Deliverance from Time* (*Du Temps perdu Au Temps retrouvé: Introduction à l’œuvre de Marcel Proust*), Truitt had a sophisticated understanding of the phenomenological dimensions of memory and the manner in which personal history enters into and impacts one’s experience of events, spaces, and objects in the public realm.¹⁴ Truitt seems

13 Greenberg, “Recentness of Sculpture,” 255. Greenberg discusses Truitt’s “feminine sensibility” in “Anne Truitt: Changer” (1968), reprinted in *Clement Greenberg, the Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4, 290.

14 See da Baca’s *Memory Work* for an account of Truitt’s reading of Proust and exposure to phenomenology.

to have been deeply invested in investigating the points where our private lives intersect with public worlds, the manner by which personal history does and does not sync with public history and, attendant to this, how the specificity of lived experience does and does not align with doctrinal assumptions about the human in general. The major proponents of both minimalism and modernism were still working within such assumptions in the early 1960s, arguing over the means of entry and legibility of the human in art, but seldom questioning what it means to be (counted as a) human under specific social conditions. In maintaining a first-person address in her work, signaled in her allusive and lyrical form—an authorial expression that the minimalists found regressive—while also constructing objects that, through their human-scale and reduction of detail, confronted the viewer with an obdurate presence—a withholding presence that Fried aligned with objecthood—Truitt refused the terms of the minimalist-modernist debates, demonstrating the poverty of both. For when quibbling over authorial presence or viewer engagement there has been a tendency to pass over what Judith Butler called “the structure of address”: the specific means by which the subjects that terms such as “author” and “viewer” name are and are not recognized as such.¹⁵

Completed, like *Early One Morning* and *Die*, just two years before the first iteration of the Civil Rights Act was finally written into law, *Hardcastle* acknowledges (accords meaning to) its historical moment in a manner that neither a strictly modernist or minimalist sensibility seemed capable. That acknowledgement required not simply registering or questioning the terms of authorial intent. It required, rather, registering the terms by which any given person is recognized as an author, or, perhaps it is better to say, a *worthy* author, in the first place. Fried refused Truitt

¹⁵ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 129.

such acknowledgement, as he has most women who make art. In enunciating her own specificity, even at the risk failing to make meaning for all viewers, Truitt's sculptures push past the aesthetic quarrels over anthropomorphism in 1960s art criticism and open onto a consideration of the politics of personhood.



FIGURE 17 Anthony Caro, *Early One Morning*, 1962. Painted steel and aluminum. 9.5 ft × 20.3 ft × 11.0 ft
© Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / DACS, London



FIGURE 18 Tony Smith, *Die*, 1962 (fabricated 1968). Steel with oiled finish. 72 × 72 × 72 inches. Gift of the Collectors Committee, National Gallery of Art, Washington.
© Tony Smith Estate / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



FIGURE 19 Anne Truitt, *Hardcastle*, 1962. Acrylic on wood. $99\frac{3}{4} \times 42 \times 16$ inches.
Private collection © annetruitt.org / Bridgeman Images.

The Metaphysics of Transhumanism

Eric T. Olson

“UPLOADING”

Transhumanism is a movement aimed at enhancing our lives by means of futuristic technology. The name derives from the ultimate goal of overcoming the limitations imposed by our humanity. Illness, injury, hunger, exhaustion, ageing, and death set a limit to the length and quality of a human life. There’s only so much you can do to make a human being better off, simply because of what it is to be human. But if we could cease to be human—or better, cease to be biological at all—we could free ourselves from these constraints.

Transhumanists hope to achieve this by what they call “uploading.” The term is tendentious. *Real* uploading is copying digital data—a document or a video, say—from an ordinary computer to a central web server. I copy my lecture notes from my desktop computer to the university server, for example, enabling my students to make their own copies on their computers at home. Transhumanist uploading involves much more than this. First, the psychological information in your brain is read by a scanning device (erasing it from the brain in the process) and converted into a digital format. It’s then transferred to a

computer: that's the part of the process that is properly called uploading. But this information is not merely stored on the computer in the way that my lecture notes are. Rather, it's used to create an electronic person with your personality, knowledge, preferences, plans, memories, and other mental features. This person is not made of flesh and blood but is "realized in" or "implemented on" the computer. The information gathered from your brain is programmed into the computer, and this creates a conscious, thinking being there.

But the aim is not merely to create electronic beings psychologically like ourselves, impressive though that would be. Rather, we ourselves are to move from the flesh to the digital realm. The process is literally supposed to transfer a human being to a computer.

Once that has happened, we shall be entirely inorganic and thus immune to illness, exhaustion, ageing, and death. If the machines that house us are damaged, we can move to other machines by a simple electronic data transfer. Travel will be as easy as emailing. No one will need food, shelter, clothes, or furniture. Our intelligence, memory, patience, capacity for pleasure, and physical strength (if we get robotic bodies) can be enhanced indefinitely—as can the length of our lives. Our human limitations will be a thing of the past. Transhumanists see this as a great benefit. (Whether they're right about that is an important question, but not one I'll try to answer.)

Uploading offers a secular version of traditional beliefs in the afterlife. It promises eternal life without any troubling religious elements: God or an immaterial soul, for instance.¹ Transhumanists have more modest goals as well, but this one is the most interesting.

1 Stephen Hawking once said: "it's theoretically possible to copy the brain onto a computer and so provide a form of life after death" (Nick Collins, "Hawking: 'In the Future Brains Could Be Separated from the Body,'" *Telegraph*, September 20, 2013). Of course Hawking meant, "copy the *psychological information* from the brain." I thank Melanie Challenger for this reference.

All this is founded on the assumption that advanced technology will make it possible to transfer a person from a human body to a computer. As the leading transhumanist Nick Bostrom puts it: “if we could scan the synaptic matrix of a human brain and simulate it on a computer then it would be possible for us to migrate from our biological embodiments to a purely digital substrate (given certain philosophical assumptions about the nature of consciousness and personal identity).”² Bostrom has no doubt that we *could* “scan the synaptic matrix of a human brain and simulate it on a computer”: not today and not tomorrow, but one day.

You may not share Bostrom’s confidence in the power of technology. You may even wonder whether “uploading” is physically possible. But there are deeper worries. He concedes that the story presupposes “certain philosophical assumptions about the nature of consciousness and personal identity.” Transhumanists are confident that these assumptions are true. But should they be?

WHAT UPLOADING PRESUPPOSES

Bostrom’s “assumption about the nature of consciousness” is that there can be genuine artificial intelligence. It’s not only possible for computers to behave intelligently—to play chess and recognize spam emails, for instance—but actually to *be* intelligent and conscious. They can have all the mental properties that you and I have.

Philosophical tradition calls a thing that is capable of rational thought, conscious experience, and awareness of itself as a being distinct from others a *person*. A person is an intelligent, self-conscious being. We human beings are people in this sense (or “persons,” as the lawyers

² Nick Bostrom, “What Is Transhumanism?,” last modified 2001, <http://www.nickbostrom.com/old/transhumanism.html>.

say), and Martians of sufficient intellect would be too. The uploading claim presupposes that it's possible to create a purely electronic person simply by programming a computer in the right way. Computers, in other words, could be people—or at any rate an electronic person could exist in or on a computer. Call this the *AI assumption*.³

The AI assumption does not imply that electronic people could be *human*. They certainly wouldn't be biologically human: the whole point of uploading is to liberate us from biology. Whether they would be human in a psychological sense is left open.

So transhumanist uploading presupposes that there could be an electronic person. But it also presupposes that a human person could *become* an electronic person. We could get *you* into a computer, not merely create a new person there with your mental properties and memories of your life—a psychological replica of you. The *same* person could be first “in” a human organism and then “in” a computer. Bostrom calls this an “assumption about personal identity” because it has to do with what it takes for a person to continue existing, as opposed to ceasing to exist and perhaps being replaced by someone else who didn't exist before.

The claim is easy to misunderstand. It's not that someone's “consciousness” could be transferred to a computer. That's a dark statement. Consciousness is a property: it's the one had by conscious beings, just as volume is the property had by things extended in three dimensions. What would it be to move a property of yours—your volume, say, or your temperature—to a computer? It might mean giving the computer that property: changing the computer so that it has the same volume or temperature that you have. But the claim that we could give computers the property of being conscious was the AI assumption. The claim at issue now is not just that there could be a conscious being in the

3 Bostrom calls it an assumption about *consciousness*, as opposed to intelligence or mentality generally. This is because he assumes either that all mentality requires consciousness or that computers could have any mental properties that don't require it. Both points are contested.

computer, but that this conscious being could be you. Describing this as “transferring your consciousness” is an obfuscation.

If we speak of moving a person or a student or a philosopher from a human organism to a computer, we see the difficulty straightaway: how can you upload a thing made of flesh and blood? But this difficulty is obscured if we speak of transferring one’s consciousness. There is no obvious obstacle to transferring someone’s consciousness to a computer, simply because the state of affairs that description evokes is so vague. It may help break the spell of the word “consciousness” to replace it with its synonym *sentience*. No one would speak of transferring someone’s sentience to a computer. Talk of uploading “the mind” or “the self” is equally opaque. The personal-identity assumption is that a human person can move from an organism to a computer by uploading.

This presupposes the AI assumption but doesn’t follow from it. If we could become electronic people, then electronic people must be possible. But that possibility would not imply that a human person could become an electronic one. Suppose, by analogy, that it were metaphysically possible for there to be a god—an immaterial, supernatural person. That would be no reason to suppose that we could become gods ourselves.

THE PERSONAL-IDENTITY ASSUMPTION

Transhumanists have eagerly defended the AI assumption—the possibility of electronic people. But they have said little about the further claim that we could literally move to computers and become electronic people ourselves—the personal-identity assumption. This is the claim I want to examine.⁴ Why should we believe it?

The transhumanists’ answer is that it follows from an attractive view of personal identity. By this they mean what it takes for a person to

4 I discuss the AI assumption in Olson, “The Metaphysics of Artificial Intelligence,” in *Consciousness and the Ontology of Properties*, ed. Mihretu Guta (London: Routledge, 2019).

persist from one time to another—to continue existing rather than cease to exist. What sorts of adventures is it possible, in the broadest sense of the word “possible,” for you to survive, and what sort of event would necessarily bring your existence to an end? What determines which past or future being is you? Suppose you point to a child in an old class photograph and say, “That’s me.” What makes you that one, rather than one of the others? What is it about the way she relates then to you as you are now that makes her you? For that matter, what makes it the case that anyone at all who existed back then is you? This is the question of personal identity over time.⁵

Transhumanists claim that the persistence through time of any person, human or otherwise, consists in a sort of psychological continuity. For a future being to be you is for its mental properties then to depend causally in a certain way on the mental properties you have now—or for there to be a chain of such causal connections. In order to be you, a future being need only inherit your personality, memories, beliefs, preferences, plans, capacity for consciousness, and so on in the right way.⁶ This inheritance can take any form, as long as it’s reliable. It doesn’t require the continuous functioning of your brain.

Think of the “transporter” from the television series *Star Trek*. When the Captain has finished his business on the alien planet, the machine scans him, dispersing his atoms. The information thereby gathered is then sent to the starship *Enterprise*, where it’s used to assemble new atoms precisely as the Captain’s were when he said “Beam me up!” The result is someone both physically and mentally just like the Captain. And not by accident: the machine reliably produces this result. (Otherwise no one would use it.) The story tells us that this suffices for the man who materializes on board the ship to be the Captain

5 Beware: the phrase “personal identity” is used to mean many other things besides our continued existence. I prefer to call it the *persistence question*.

6 For details, see Sydney Shoemaker, “Personal Identity: A Materialist’s Account,” in Sydney Shoemaker and Richard Swinburne, *Personal Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 90.

himself—not merely a perfect copy, mistakenly convinced that he’s the Captain.

Or consider Sidney Shoemaker’s “brain-state transfer” machine (equally fictional).⁷ It scans your brain as in the uploading story, recording and then erasing the psychological information stored there. This information is then transferred to another human organism with a “blank” brain, again resulting in someone who is psychologically just as you were at the time of the scan. Shoemaker argues that because this being would be psychologically continuous with you, he or she would be you: the process would move you from one organism to another.

The claim, then, is that our continued existence consists in psychological continuity of this sort. Derek Parfit once called this the “wide psychological criterion” of personal identity.⁸ It implies that if the person who appeared in the computer as a result of uploading the information from your brain were psychologically continuous with you (supposing, as the AI assumption says, that there could be such a person), she would be you.

It’s hard to see how uploading could move you to a computer unless the wide psychological criterion is true. But whatever its appeal to transhumanists and Trekkies, not many philosophers accept it. Some deny that our persistence consists in psychological continuity of any sort.⁹ And most of those who think it does consist in psychological continuity require this continuity to be achieved by the “continuous physical realization” of our mental properties.¹⁰ You could perhaps leave your body behind by having your brain removed and kept intact, but not merely by having its information read off and then copied somewhere else. Think about the period between the brain scan and

7 Shoemaker, “Personal Identity,” 108–11.

8 *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1984), 207. He does not actually endorse this view.

9 I’m one of them: see Eric Olson, *What Are We?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23–44.

10 The phrase is from Peter Unger, *Identity, Consciousness, and Value* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 140.

the creation of a person like you in the computer (or between your “departure” by transporter and the appearance of someone like you at the destination). During that time your mental properties are not “realized” at all.¹¹ You have no mental properties then: no thoughts, experiences, plans, memories, or preferences. You lack even the capacity for mental activity—and not because that capacity is temporarily disabled, as by a general anesthetic, but because there is no mechanism whose normal workings would enable you to exercise it.

There are grave objections to the wide psychological criterion, and thus to the metaphysical possibility of uploading. Here are just two.

THE MYSTERY OF BRANCHING

The first is well known. If you could be uploaded once, you could be uploaded twice. The relevant information could be read off your brain and copied simultaneously to two independent computers in just the way that transhumanists would copy it to one. The result would be two electronic people, each psychologically just as you were when you were scanned. Each would get his or her mental properties from you in the same reliable way. If that suffices for someone to be you, then both must be.

But that’s logically impossible. One thing can’t be identical to two things that are distinct from each other. If you and the first electronic person were one, and you and the second electronic person were one, then the first electronic person and the second electronic person would also have to be one. This is an elementary fact about the numerical concepts *one* and *two*. Yet there are two people afterward, not one. Supposing that you move to two computers by “double upload” leads to a contradiction.¹²

11 Shoemaker (“Personal Identity,” 110–11) says they are realized in the machine. But this is realization in a different sense from the one most psychological-continuity theorists speak of.

12 Temporal-parts theorists say otherwise. This is a large topic that I cannot go into here; for details see David Lewis, “Survival and Identity,” in *The Identities of Persons*, ed. Amélie Rorty

This sort of problem is much discussed because it arises on almost any psychological-continuity view of personal identity. The most commonly proposed solution is to say that someone's being psychologically continuous with you in the future is not actually sufficient for you to continue existing. What's required is *nonbranching* psychological continuity. A future person is you only if she is psychologically continuous with you, and in addition this continuity does not take a "branching" form where there are two such people.¹³ So transhumanists may say that if the psychological information from your brain were uploaded only once, the resulting person would be you; but if it were simultaneously uploaded twice, neither resulting person would be you. Each would be a new person with false memories of your life—memories of things she never did. You could move to a computer by single upload but not by double upload.

But this creates a mystery. Why should an event that would normally preserve your existence bring it to an end if accompanied by a second such event—one having no causal influence on the first? What is it about the second upload that destroys you?¹⁴ No satisfying answer to this question has ever been proposed. It's no good saying that surviving double uploading would lead to a logical contradiction. That may be a reason to think that it *is* impossible, but no explanation of why it is. It doesn't explain how the second upload brings your existence to an end.

The current proposal faces an especially awkward version of the branching problem. In the usual uploading stories, the scanner erases the brain. But it needn't: the information could be read off without any erasure, then copied to a computer and used to create a person there as in the original story. Transhumanists call this "nondestructive

(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); Olson, *What Are We?*, 117–19. I discuss its application to uploading in Olson, "The Central Dogma of Transhumanism," in *Perspectives on the Self*, ed. Boran Bercic (Croatia, Rijeka: University of Rijeka Press, 2017).

13 See e.g. Shoemaker, "Personal Identity," 85; Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 207.

14 For a good discussion of this problem, see Harold Noonan, *Personal Identity*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2003), 127–39.

uploading.” The result would be two people—one human, one electronic—each psychologically continuous with you. According to the nonbranching proposal, neither would be you, as this would be a case of branching. And there is no one else after the transfer that you could be. You would cease to exist. Nondestructive uploading may appear harmless, but would in fact be fatal.¹⁵

Transhumanists may reply that you *could* survive branching in this case: if the procedure leaves your brain intact, you carry on as usual, and the electronic person created in the computer is someone new. But although that’s surely right, it only creates another mystery: why is it possible to survive “asymmetric” but not “symmetric” branching? The idea behind uploading is that copying the psychological information from your brain to a computer would move you to the computer. Why should it do so only if that information is erased from your brain? Why is that act of destruction necessary to send you on your way?

It’s easy to see that the same mysteries arise in cases not involving uploading: we need only imagine a variant of the transporter that produces two copies the Captain on board the ship, or one that scans him without dispersing his atoms.¹⁶

THE DUPLICATION PROBLEM

A second worry about the personal-identity assumption arises from the fact that there is a difference between any concrete object and a copy or replica of that object, no matter how exact. I don’t mean a qualitative difference. A replica of the Rosetta stone might be entirely indistinguishable from the original, right down to its subatomic structure, but still the replica would be one thing and the original another. One would have been created by geological processes millions of years ago

15 David Chalmers hesitantly accepts this: “The Singularity: A Philosophical Analysis,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 17, nos. 9–10 (2010): 55.

16 Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 200–201.

and carved by Egyptians in the second century BCE. The other would have been created only today by the Martians.

The same goes for people: there's a difference between a person and a replica of that person. There could be a replica of Ludwig Wittgenstein as he was at any moment during his life. It may resemble him in all intrinsic respects, or it may be only a psychological replica, with all his intrinsic mental properties but physically different. The AI assumption implies that we could create a psychological replica of Wittgenstein by programming a computer in the right way. And the personal-identity assumption implies that by doing so we could upload Wittgenstein himself.

Now imagine that the Martians (who have all the technology that we lack) visited the earth shortly before Wittgenstein's death and made a detailed scan of his brain. The British Wittgenstein Society acquires a copy of the scan, and proposes to use it to create a psychological replica of him as he was then, so that they can put to the replica all the questions about Wittgenstein's philosophy that have accumulated in the intervening decades. (They have a long list.) The replica would be able to answer their questions just as well as the original could. They don't want to bring back Wittgenstein himself because the interrogation will be stressful and they think he deserves his rest. The Austrian Wittgenstein Society, however, has no such scruples, and wants to use its own copy of the scan to bring back the great man himself.

If human beings can be uploaded, both endeavors should be possible: Wittgenstein himself can exist in a computer, and so can another person psychologically just like him. But what would the two societies have to do differently so that the Austrians got the original and the British got a replica? There appears to be nothing they *could* do differently. To create a psychological replica of Wittgenstein as he was at the time of the scan, the British would have to program the information into a computer so as to create a person with the mental properties that Wittgenstein had then. The Austrians would do precisely the same—and according to the personal-identity assumption, that would

recreate Wittgenstein himself. (To avoid complications to do with branching, suppose that only one society actually carries out its plan.)

It would follow that there is no difference between bringing Wittgenstein back to life and creating a mere replica of him. There is, accordingly, no difference between your being uploaded into a computer and the creation there of a new person psychologically just like you. This conflicts not only with the indisputable fact that there *is* a difference between an original object and a copy, but also with the personal-identity assumption: if you yourself, as opposed to a mere replica of you, could exist in a computer, there must be a difference between these two states of affairs.

Or maybe the problem is not that there would be no difference between originals and copies, but that the difference would be nothing like what we thought it was. Again, the personal-identity assumption is based on the view that our persistence consists in psychological continuity with any reliable cause (and perhaps no branching). It follows that any being sufficiently like Wittgenstein in his mental properties must be Wittgenstein himself, as long as the resemblance is not accidental (and there's no branching). In their attempt to do him the kindness of creating only a replica, the British would inadvertently resurrect the poor man from his quiet grave in Cambridge. That's like saying that if the owners of a Las Vegas hotel set out to build a replica of the Colossus of Rhodes on the basis of newly discovered blueprints, and the resemblance were near enough, they would have on their hands not a modern replica but the original statue—a historic artifact cast thousands of years ago in the foundries of ancient Greece. The modern-day Greeks could reasonably ask for it to be given back.

MATERIAL THINGS AND MATERIAL CONTINUITY

I have argued that the personal-identity assumption has troubling implications about branching and about the difference between originals and replicas. These are good reasons to doubt whether uploading

is metaphysically possible. But I haven't explained *why* it isn't. Pointing out that uploading would have absurd consequences may show that it could never happen, but it won't tell us why it couldn't. What is it about the procedure that prevents it from moving us to a computer?

I think the reason we cannot be uploaded is that we're material things. We're made entirely of matter. And a material thing cannot continue existing without some sort of material continuity.¹⁷ It must continue to be made up of some of the matter that made it up previously. It can change all of its matter if this happens gradually enough, but it can't change all its matter at once. It follows that you can't move a material thing from one place to another merely by transferring information. You can't send a human being as a message by telegraph (despite the joke in *Alice in Wonderland*)—or as a text message or an email attachment.

And there is no material continuity in uploading. No matter moves up the wires from a human organism to a computer. (If something seems to move, consider that the information could as well be written down in a letter or dictated over the phone.) You can't upload a human being for the same reason that you can't upload a tree or a brick.

We can make the point more vivid by thinking about what sort of material things we might be. We might be biological organisms.¹⁸ (The appearance that we're material things is arguably the appearance that we're organisms. If you examine yourself in the mirror, you see an organism. It seems the same size as you—no bigger or smaller. We appear to have all the physical properties of human organisms, and the same behavior. They certainly don't appear to be *other* things

17 For a powerful defense of this claim, see Peter van Inwagen, "Materialism and the Psychological-Continuity View of Personal Identity," in *Philosophical Perspectives 11: Mind, Causation, and World*, ed. James Tomberlin (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997). Corabi and Schneider say that we can't be uploaded because this would involve a gap in our existence and this is impossible, but their account of why it's impossible is obscure: Joe Corabi and Susan Schneider, "The Metaphysics of Uploading," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 19, nos. 7–8 (2012): 26–44. Temporal-parts theorists can avoid the problem: see Olson, "The Central Dogma of Transhumanism."

18 I defend this view in chapter 2 of *What Are We?*

than ourselves.) But you can't move a biological organism—a human animal or a dog or a tree—to a computer by scanning it and uploading the information thereby gathered. Scanning may leave the organism unharmed. Or it may damage it, perhaps fatally. It may even completely destroy the organism by dispersing its atoms, as the *Star Trek* transporter does. But no matter what form the scan takes, the organism stays behind. Our being organisms would make uploading metaphysically impossible.

We might of course be material things other than organisms. We might be brains, literally made up entirely of soft, pinkish tissue and located within the skull.¹⁹ But scanning your brain can't remove it from your head. The organ may remain unchanged in the scanning process, or it may be damaged, or even completely destroyed by having its atoms dispersed; but it doesn't move to a computer. A brain can no more be uploaded than a foot can.

The same goes any other material thing. If you scan it and transfer the information thereby gathered to a computer, whether electronically, in writing, or orally, the material thing stays where it is. Our being uploadable would rule out our being material things of any sort. Each of us would have a property that no material thing could have: the capacity to be sent as a text message. The reason we can't be uploaded is that we're material things and it's metaphysically impossible to move a material thing without moving matter.²⁰

Some metaphysicians say that certain material things *can* move by a mere transfer of information, even if organisms and brains can't. Specifically, human beings can. The thought is that human beings are

19 Derek Parfit, "We Are Not Human Beings," *Philosophy* 87 (2012), 5–28; Hud Hudson, "I Am Not an Animal!," in *Persons: Human and Divine*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 216–36. For discussion and further references see Olson, *What Are We?*, 76–98.

20 This does not rule out our becoming electronic people by gradually replacing our organic parts with bits of computer hardware till none remain. I lack the space to discuss this view. But I know of no one who thinks that we could survive gradual transformation into electronic people but not uploading.

material things “constituted by” organisms.²¹ We’re made of the same matter as human organisms, and are physically indistinguishable from them. But although *they* need material continuity to survive, we don’t. In uploading, a person is constituted first by a human organism and then by a computer.²²

There is a large debate about whether “constitution” is even possible.²³ But in the current context this is a distraction. Our being constituted by organisms would do nothing to show how material things could survive without material continuity. If you want to explain how a material thing can be sent as a text message, it’s no help claiming that it shares its matter with another thing that *can’t* be sent as a text message. Nor, come to that, does the proposal suggest any solution to the branching or duplication problems.

THE PATTERN VIEW

Those are my reasons for doubting the possibility of uploading. The rest of this essay will consider replies. The most obvious is this: if material things can’t be uploaded, could we not be *immaterial* things—things not made of matter?

This would have a dramatic implication: that it’s metaphysically impossible for any material thing to think or be conscious. If human beings are immaterial, then presumably all beings with mental properties must be immaterial. If it were ever possible for any conscious being to be made of matter, *we’d* be made of matter. We *seem* to be material things. When you look at yourself or any other human being, you see nothing but flesh and bone. We’re as material as any conscious being

21 Shoemaker, “Personal Identity,” 108–14; Lynne Rudder Baker, “Death and the Afterlife,” in *Oxford Handbook for the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. William Wainwright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): 366–39.

22 Lynne Rudder Baker, *Persons and Bodies: A Constitution View* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 109.

23 For a summary with references, see Olson, *What Are We?*, 48–75.

could ever be. If we're *not* material, despite every appearance to the contrary, that can only be because all conscious beings must be immaterial.

Or again: if human beings could be uploaded by having their psychological information programmed into a computer, then any thinking or conscious being could be. It could hardly be that some thinking beings are uploadable and others are not. What could account for this difference? And what reason could we have to suppose that we belong to the uploadable kind? Yet as we've seen, no material thing is uploadable: that was the reason for supposing that we must be immaterial. Any thinking or conscious being must therefore have a property that no material thing could have, namely being uploadable. It follows that no material thing could think or be conscious.

So there are thinking or conscious things and there are material things, but nothing can be both. The property of being conscious and the property of being made of matter are metaphysically incompatible. What we ordinarily take to be a conscious human being made of matter is really two things: a conscious, immaterial thing (traditionally called a "soul") and an unconscious, material thing. This is the view known as substance dualism. Transhumanists don't want to be substance dualists. Unless a material thing can somehow be sent as a text message, however, they can't avoid it.²⁴ If we can be uploaded but material things cannot be, we must inevitably conclude that we're not material things. And whatever is not a material thing is an immaterial thing.

But simply denying that we're immaterial things is not enough to defend the possibility of uploading. How would one go about transferring an immaterial thing—a soul—from a human organism to a computer? The suggestion has to be that we're immaterial things of a sort that could be uploaded.

24 Or they could deny the reality of the material world altogether and embrace idealism. In that case all bets are off.

Transhumanists often say that a person is not a material thing but rather a sort of pattern or bundle of information. Bostrom claims that we might one day “live as information patterns on vast super-fast computer networks.”²⁵ Ray Kurzweil (another enthusiastic transhumanist) says that because living organisms constantly exchange matter with their surroundings, “all that persists is the pattern of organization of that stuff . . . like the pattern that water makes in a stream as it rushes past the rocks in its path. . . . Perhaps, therefore, we should say that I am a pattern of matter and energy that persists over time.”²⁶ This thought is not confined to transhumanists: Daniel Dennett suggests that “what you are is that organization of information that has structured your body’s control system.”²⁷ We say that the same organization or pattern is present in the A-team during the first half of the football match and in the B-team during the second half. Might it not be present first in a biological organism and then in a computer? If so, the scanning-and-uploading procedure that transhumanists imagine would bring it about. If human beings are such patterns, that might make us uploadable.

The proposal must be that a human being—the author of this essay, for instance—is literally a pattern. It can’t be merely that mental states or events are information patterns, or that to think is to exemplify a certain sort of pattern. That would do nothing to explain how someone could move from an organism to a computer. (In fact it’s incompatible with our being organisms.) It must be a view about the metaphysical nature of thinking beings.

As I see it, the attraction of the “pattern view” is due entirely to its vagueness. It’s rarely stated in enough detail to make clear what would

25 Nick Bostrom et al., “Transhumanist FAQ, 3.0,” <http://humanityplus.org/philosophy/transhumanist-faq/>, accessed August 9, 2016.

26 Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (London: Duckworth, 2006), 383.

27 Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991), 430. For the suggestion that a computer program could be a person, see Dennett, “Where Am I?,” in *Brainstorms* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978), 310–33.

actually follow from it. Once this is done, it becomes impossible to take seriously.

What is a pattern? Not a material thing—that was the whole point of the proposal. It must be something that can in some sense be present in different material things: first in an organism and then in a computer, for example. Presumably a pattern is a universal rather than a particular—a type rather than a token, like a novel rather than a particular hard copy of a novel. The proposal must be that each of us stands to a particular human organism as *Brighton Rock* stands to the old paperback on my shelf, except that each of us exists in only one copy. The person, like the novel, is not something we can see or touch. It's abstract and intangible. It's present in the physical world only in the way that justice is present when the legal system is working properly, or that the number eleven is present when all the players are on the field.

That still leaves many questions unanswered, but it's enough to start with. To my knowledge, no professional metaphysician—no one whose job it is to think systematically about the fundamental nature of concrete and abstract objects—has ever held such a view. Here are just two obvious objections.

First, think about which pattern a human being might be. Given the length of my life, I'd have to be a pattern sufficiently general and undemanding as to be shared by a drooling infant, a moody teenager, a middle-aged academic, and a senile old man. This human organism exemplifies many different patterns as it changes. But there would have to be a single pattern that is always present in it, and which is compatible with any course my life may take in the future.

It may be that patterns are abundant, so that there's bound to be *some* highly variegated pattern that this organism exemplifies throughout its life. But in that case there are millions of other patterns that it exemplifies for shorter periods: years, days, hours, seconds. What could make it the case that of all these patterns, just one of them was me? Why one rather than any of the others? The pattern that I am would of course have to be conscious and think my thoughts: if I know anything about

myself, I know that I'm conscious and thinking. But how could just one of the patterns be conscious? And why should it be one that's variable enough to be present in this organism from cradle to grave? If any pattern of information could be conscious, wouldn't a large number of those present in this organism be so, including some that are present for only a day or an hour? That would leave me in the absurd predicament of wondering which of these many thinking patterns was me, and whether I existed last year or came into being only yesterday. I can't see how anything that can legitimately be called a pattern of information could both last throughout my life and be the only thinker of my thoughts.

The second problem arises when we recall the "British" and the "Austrian" Wittgenstein from my fanciful story. (Imagine now that they exist simultaneously.) The pattern view implies that the original Wittgenstein is a single pattern that they both exemplify. (Ignore the problem of which pattern it is.) So the two latter-day Wittgensteins are in one sense the same philosopher and in another sense not: they're two tokens of the same type, like two hard copies of *Brighton Rock*. Now suppose that the British Wittgenstein is awake and thinking hard at a time when the Austrian Wittgenstein is asleep and unconscious. Is Wittgenstein awake or asleep?

We might say that he's awake in the sense of having a concrete instance that's awake, and asleep in the sense of having another instance that's asleep, just as *Brighton Rock* is both torn, insofar as my copy is torn, and intact, insofar as yours is undamaged. But the pattern view implies that strictly speaking, Wittgenstein himself neither wakes nor sleeps, just as *Brighton Rock* itself is neither torn nor intact. He doesn't really think. Only his particular instances do these things—the concrete, material things that exemplify the pattern. But of course he does think: he is, after all, a philosopher. It follows that Wittgenstein is not a pattern but at best something that exemplifies certain patterns. And because we ourselves are thinking, conscious beings, we're not patterns either.

Transhumanists cannot avoid the metaphysical problems facing their view simply by denying that we're material things.²⁸

PARFITIAN TRANSHUMANISM

Transhumanists need to say what sort of thing could be conscious, intelligent, and transferrable from an organism to a computer. And they need to solve the branching and duplication problems. They have their work cut out for them.

Suppose we can't be uploaded. The most we could get by scanning your brain and programming the information extracted from it into a computer is a psychological replica of you. Transhumanists might be willing to concede all this. They could say that although uploading could not give us numerical identity between the scanned human person and the replica in the computer—it couldn't make them one and the same—it could give us what matters practically in identity. Even if an electronic person could not literally be you, it might be just as good, as far as anyone's interests are concerned, as if she were. It's not a difference that we have any reason to care about.²⁹

The thought, advocated by Derek Parfit and others, is that your interest in continuing to exist is not an interest in there being a future person who *is* you—that is, numerically identical with you—but in there being a future person bearing some other relation to you. Parfit thought this relation was psychological continuity, broadly construed so as not to require continuous physical realization of mental properties (so that it could hold in cases of *Star Trek* teleportation) and without any nonbranching restriction (so that it can hold between you

28 For further objections to the "pattern view," see Olson, *What Are We?*, 145–49. Another species of dualism that transhumanists might explore is the Humean view that each of us is a "bundle of perceptions." But that's a large topic and I can't discuss it here.

29 This may be the view of Eric Steinhart in *Your Digital Afterlives* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 62–68, though there is much in his account that I don't understand.

and two future people).³⁰ His view was that I have no selfish or prudential reason to care whether I myself exist tomorrow. What I have reason to care about is only whether someone exists then who is psychologically continuous with me as I am now.

In all real cases, any future being who is psychologically continuous with me really is me. But not in all possible cases. I might undergo branching, so that neither resulting person is me and I cease to exist. But because they'd both be psychologically continuous with me, this would be just as good for me as if I actually survived. And so would destroying me and creating a psychological duplicate of me in a computer.

Parfit also thought that whether I have a selfish or prudential interest in someone's future welfare depends not on whether that person is me, but only on whether he's psychologically continuous with me. Someone's being psychologically continuous, tomorrow, with me as I am now gives me the same reason to care about his welfare then that I have to care about my own welfare. If he has to spend the next week marking undergraduate essays, I have the same reason for dread as when I myself have to spend the next week marking essays.

The proposal, then, is that the existence of an electronic person in a computer could give me everything I have reason to want in wanting to continue living. I could have the same reason to care about his welfare as I have to care about my own—a reason I'd have even if I were completely selfish and would not lift a finger to save my own mother from unbearable agony. Whether he would literally be me is of merely theoretical interest. All that matters practically is whether he would be psychologically continuous with me. Transhumanists could then dispense with the personal-identity assumption. Even if we can't enter the promised electronic realm ourselves, our "Parfitian successors" can

30 Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 262. More precisely, it's psychological continuity combined with a degree of "connectedness"—roughly psychological similarity. The difference is unimportant for my purposes here: in all the cases discussed here there is both continuity and connectedness.

dwell there, and for us that's just as good. We might call this *Parfitian transhumanism*.

The trouble with this proposal is that the idea it's based on looks false. The existence of a future person psychologically continuous with me does not appear to have the same practical consequences as my surviving. Someone's being psychologically continuous with me does not by itself seem to give me any selfish reason to care about his welfare. Consider again the case of "nondestructive uploading." Suppose I'm kidnapped, and the Martians are going to scan my brain and use the information thereby gathered to create an electronic person psychologically just like me. Because the scanning is harmless, the process will leave behind a human being exactly like me, and materially continuous with me to boot. Nearly everyone would say that he *is* me. Suppose this is right. Yet both people will be psychologically continuous with me as I am now. One will then be brutally tortured. Otherwise they'll be treated identically: perhaps both will be suddenly and painlessly killed, one after a week of agony and the other after a week spent pleasantly. Though the torture will be the same no matter what I do, my captors allow me to choose, before the uploading takes place, which one gets it: me or the electronic person.

If uploading preserved what matters practically, there would be no reason for me to prefer one alternative over the other. I'd have the same selfish reason to care about the electronic person's welfare as I have to care about my own. I may as well toss a coin. But that's not how it seems. I don't know about you, but I would far rather have the electronic person tortured. I suspect, in fact, that if I were entirely selfish I'd be completely indifferent about his welfare. My only concern would be for myself.

Or imagine that the Martians learn how to scan people's brains without their noticing, making kidnapping unnecessary. They then upload the information from the scan into a computer, creating an electronic person psychologically identical to the original as in the previous story. The electronic person is then tortured. Suppose the

Martians have been active in my neighborhood and there is a real chance that they will scan my brain tonight as I sleep and torture the resulting electronic person. If uploading preserved what matters prudentially, I ought to be just as worried about this as I'd be if I thought there was a real chance that I myself was going to be tortured. But anyone would find the second case far more frightening.

Of course, we may be wrong about what matters in these cases—that is, about what we have a prudential reason to care about. Maybe it would be just as irrational for me to care about my own welfare but not about that of the electronic person created by the Martians as it would be for me to care what happens to me on Tuesdays and Thursdays but not what happens to me on other days. But that would make Parfitian transhumanism hard to believe.

FINAL REMARKS

It may, perhaps, be possible to create purely electronic people mentally superior to ourselves and free from human limitations. We may even have reason to do so: these beings might be able to carry out our projects far better than we ever could. They may be able to survive the changes to the climate that are likely to devastate living things. But even if all this is true, it doesn't look as if we human beings could become purely electronic.

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